

Tabitha at Ivy Hall

Ruth
Alberta
Brown



IVY HALL SERIES





She began her first letter to the father she did not know or understand.
(Page 296.)

TABITHA AT IVY HALL

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To My Mother

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TABITHA AT IVY HALL

CHAPTER I

THE HATEFUL NAME

“She leaned far out on the window-sill,
And shook it forth with a royal will.

‘Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,
But spare your country’s flag,’ she said.”

The black eyes of the little speaker burned with fiery indignation as she hurled these words of defiance at a ten-quart pail of blackberries standing in the middle of the dusty road where she had set it when the emotion of her recital had overcome her to such a degree that mere words were no longer effective and gestures had become absolutely necessary. She was living it herself. What did it matter that there was no rebel army confronting her, what did it matter that the town of Frederick lay

hundreds of miles away, what did it matter that she was merely a slip of a girl living fifty years after the terrible scenes of war which inspired the words she was reciting?

The whole picture lay as vividly before her as if she had been Dame Barbara herself, and she entered into the spirit of the production with such vim that her actual surroundings were forgotten. Her thin, peaked face, browned by sun and wind, was glorified with patriotism, and her voice rang sharp with the intensity of feeling. Having no flag to shake in the face of the approaching enemy, she pulled a mullein stalk growing among the tall grass and flaunted it so vigorously that in leaning over her imaginary window-sill she lost her balance and was nearly capsized into her pail of luscious berries.

A rude laugh interrupted her and she was brought to earth with a suddenness that left her breathless and crimson with embarrassment beside the road, digging her bare toes into the gray dust and waiting for the jeers she knew were to follow.

Then her face changed and the defiance flashed back into the big black eyes. Her tor-

mentor was not the person she had evidently expected it to be, and her courage rose accordingly. Again the boy laughed insolently and the girl's fists clenched involuntarily as she looked up into the sneering face above her and realized that after all she could do him no harm for he was perched in the branches of a tree just out of reach over her head. His bare legs dangled tantalizingly among the green leaves, and all she could do to show her fierce hatred was to grimace at him. The effect was most startling. Her tormentor lost his hold on the upper bough and slid from his seat. There was a lively scratching and clawing among the branches; while below, the black-eyed girl held her breath in expectancy. Oh, if only he would tumble! But he did not fall, and her expression of jubilation changed to disappointment.

Carefully he righted himself on the limb where he had landed, and, peering down at the child in the road, tauntingly cried,

"Don't we think we are smart, Tabby Catt, Tabby Catt? Don't we think we are smart?"

The girl's lips curved scornfully, but her hard fists tightened until her knuckles stood out like white balls.

"How's Thomas Catt today?" continued the boy, swinging his feet dangerously near the tattered sunbonnet, which half concealed the angry little face below.

Still she deigned no reply, though her eyes blazed furiously and her breath came quick and short. She took a step nearer the tree and he cautiously drew his feet up to the branch on which he sat; but apparently she did not notice this move, as she stood measuring the distance from the ground to the limbs above and wondering whether or not she could reach him and give him the drubbing he deserved before he had a chance to escape or call for help. She could climb like a squirrel and run like a deer, but in the pasture beyond this fringe of trees was the boy's big brother, and she had no desire to meet him, having once had a taste of his great whip.

Perhaps the boy in the tree guessed her thoughts, for once more he lowered his feet and kicked viciously at her as he chanted:

“Tabby Catt, Tabby Catt,
Drink some milk and make you fat,
Skinny, scrawny Tabby Catt.”

The faded calico bonnet caught on his toes and he tossed it high in the air, letting it fall far out in the dust of the road. Never pausing to see what was the fate of her possessions, the child let out one scream of animal rage, and with a tiger-like spring caught the feet of her enemy and jerked the coward off his perch.

Taken off his guard, he fell heavily into the road, crushing her beneath him, and raising such a cloud of dust that both were nearly smothered; but with a dexterous twist she freed herself, and, unconscious of the dust, the boy's screams or the sound of answering shouts in the pasture nearby, she fell to pummelling her helpless victim with relentless fists, all the while screaming at the top of her voice,

“I am a Tabby Catt, am I? I am scrawny and skinny, am I? Well, you're a coward, a good-for-nothing coward, and so is your big brother. He wouldn't dare fight Tom, and you wouldn't dare say such things to me if Tom was anywhere near. You're a bully, an overgrown baby, a 'fraid-cat! Yes, that's

what you are! *I* may be a Tabby Catt, but I'm *not* a 'fraid-cat. I may be skinny and scrawny now, but I reckon you will be, too, when I get through with you, Joe Pomeroy! You're the sneakin'est sneak that ever lived—except your brother. 'Fraid-cat, sneak, sneak, sneak, s-n-e-a-k—"

Words failed her. What could she say mean enough to express her contempt for the howling coward almost twice her size pinned under her knees, making no attempt to defend himself against the rain of blows falling wherever the avenging fists could strike?

Suddenly she felt herself snatched from the back of her victim, held high in the air so her feet did not touch the ground, and shaken to and fro as a terrier shakes a rat. She twisted and turned and writhed and squirmed to free herself, thinking this must be the big brother punishing her for the drubbing she had given hapless Joe, and expecting any instant to feel the lash of his heavy herder's whip. But no whip struck her, and with one great tug she broke loose from the hand that gripped her shoulder, and confronted—not Sneed Pomeroy, the bully, but a tall, swarthy-faced man

with a long beard and snapping black eyes, very much like her own, had she taken the time to notice it, who held her transfixed for a moment with his angry gaze. Amazed to find Joe's rescuer—for such he appeared to her—some one other than the big brother Sneed, and angered at the vigorous shaking he had given her, the child found vent for her outraged feelings in a horrible grimace at the stalwart man in front of her. With an exclamation of anger the stranger raised his hand as if to strike the girl, but she dodged the blow, and screamed in disdainful defiance:

“Slap, if you dare, you old gray head,
I'll scratch like a—cat—till you'll wish you
were dead.”

She hesitated a moment before choosing that word, and as it fell from her lips, she glanced apprehensively at the blubbering Joe still lying in the dust, and saw for the first time that this rescuer, whoever he might be, was evidently unknown to Joe, for the coward's bloody face was even more scared than when she had been pounding it, and he looked as if he, too, expected to receive some punishment from the hands of the mysterious stranger.

“Tabitha Catt!”

She whirled toward the man in frightened silence, and her clenched hands dropped nerveless at her side. It was her father! What a change the heavy beard made in his appearance; and then besides, it was almost a year since she had seen him. No wonder she had failed to recognize him in her anger. It would have taken more than one glance had she met him under ordinary circumstances.

“Put on your bonnet and march home. We will settle matters there.”

His words sounded so ominous that she hastily did as he bid, wondering dully whether at last her day of reckoning had come.

“Here, boy, take your berries and be off, but if I ever catch you hec—”

“Those are my berries,” Tabitha found courage to say, suddenly remembering the pail heaped full of the fruit she had toiled all the morning to pick; and the man, glancing down at her bony hands, scratched and scarred by blackberry thorns, thrust the heavy pail into her arms and without a word followed her in the dusty march toward the house a quarter of a mile distant; nor did he once offer to help

her with her load, though the way was rough, the day intensely hot, and the weight too much for the slender shoulders of the child. Once she stubbed her toe, and he pulled her roughly to her feet, but released his hold on her arm when she fixed her black eyes full of scorn and anger upon his face; and a grim smile played an instant about his lips, but was gone again before the child could see it.

The house was reached at last, and with a sigh of relief Tabitha dropped her burden in the doorway and sank down beside it.

At the sound of steps on the gravel walk, a fussy, fidgety little woman appeared from the room beyond, and stopped in astonishment at sight of the giant coming up the steps. Before she had a chance to express her surprise, however, he spoke, addressing the panting child fanning herself with her bonnet:

"Close that screen. Can't you see those flies coming in? Go to my room, I want to have an understanding with you. Maria, Tabitha isn't to have a taste of those berries. I just found her in the middle of the road down here fighting with a boy, like the rowdy she is."

Accustomed to obey this stern father, Tabitha had withdrawn into the house, and started for the room where punishment awaited her. At his command in regard to the berries, however, she paused; then turned to where the pail stood just inside the screen, seized it, and before either of the two spectators understood what she was about, she flung bucket, berries and all into the dooryard and ground the shining fruit into the sand with her bare feet.

"There, Manx Catt," she exclaimed, "I reckon you won't have a taste of them either!"

A gasp of dismay escaped the frightened woman, but again the grim smile flitted across the face of the father, though he looked like a thunder cloud as he roared at the child, "Go straight to your room and to bed! You shall not have a thing to eat today!"

With her feet stained a dirty purple, Tabitha marched into the house and upstairs, rushed to her little bed in the corner, and threw herself full length on the counterpane, regardless of the fact that drops of berry juice still dripped from her brown legs. For fully ten minutes she lay there, fighting back the angry

tears and battling with the fierce rage against her father.

"I hate him, I hate him!" she told herself over and over again. "It's bad enough to have him name me Tabitha without his acting so hateful every time he comes home. I wish he would go off to the mines and stay forever. He might take Aunt Maria, too, though she ain't so bad. We could get along with her all right; sometimes she is splendid, even if she is so fussy. Oh, dear, why can't we have a nice mother like other children have? I reckon ours wouldn't have died if she had known Aunt Maria would have to take care of us and Dad would be so horrid."

Her list of woes was fast increasing, and the tears were very near the bubbling-over point, when she heard heavy steps on the stairs.

"Oh, my sakes! that's Dad. Wonder if he will lick me this time. I 'spect he will some day, and Tom says he licks awful hard. Wonder if he will use a whip like sneaky Sneed Pomeroy. Wisht I was as big as Tom; he don't get licked any more, he's too big. Dad told me to go to bed and I ain't undressed. Maybe it's just as well if he's going to lick me."

The steps had reached the upper floor now, and she cowered in a trembling heap in the middle of her bed waiting for the door to open and let her father enter. But they continued down the hall without so much as pausing before her door, and now as her heart began to beat normally again, she heard Aunt Maria's voice saying, "There's a dreadful clutter to move if we take everything. Some of those boxes we brought from Dover have never been opened though we've been here two years now. Doesn't seem as if we had to take all that truck with us wherever we go. There hasn't been a thing in the stuff that we've needed."

"Then don't take it," cut in the man's heavy voice. "Where is it?"

Cautiously creeping off the bed, Tabitha pressed her ear to the keyhole to catch the rest of this interesting conversation, but as she listened, her face paled and a rebellious look came into the expressive black eyes.

So they were going to move away! Where would they go this time? It seemed to her that moving was all they ever did. Not that she minded the moving part of it—that was fun—but—. Here the tears came in earnest.

It was her dreadful name that she minded. It didn't make any difference where they went, everyone made fun of her name, and folks no sooner got used to seeing her odd little figure and hearing her still odder name than they moved to some other town, and the same thing had to be lived over. Oh, it was too bad!

All the hot afternoon father and aunt busied themselves in the adjoining rooms, tearing open boxes, sorting, re-packing, and bundling things around generally, until finally the noise became so great that only an occasional word of the conversation could be heard by the little listener at the keyhole. As the day waned, however, and the supper hour approached, both workers ceased their pounding and went downstairs, leaving Tabitha alone with her tearful reflections in the gathering dusk. Here Tom found her, still huddled in a heap beside the door.

"Oh, Tom," she greeted him, "I thought you would never come. What made you so late? Did you know Dad had come home again? Haven't you something in your pocket to eat? I'm hungry as a wolf."

"Hush!" he said, slipping inside the door

and closing it softly behind him. "Dad would be awfully mad if he knew I was here. I just got home. Had an errand across the pond after the store was closed. Here's a biscuit and some cheese. Why aren't you in bed? Aunt Maria said Dad sent you there at noon." As he spoke, the boy lifted the little sister to her feet, brushed out her crumpled dress, smoothed back her tangled hair and slipped the biscuit saved from his own supper into her eager hands.

"I did go to bed," mumbled Tabitha, with her mouth full of bread.

"You aren't undressed."

"Dad didn't say I had to undress, and he didn't say I had to *stay* in bed, either."

Tom grinned at her understanding of the law, but the darkness hid his face, so his amusement was lost to the small sister eating so ravenously.

"Did he lick you, Puss?"

"Nope. I thought he was going to, for he looked right mad, but I reckon I was so mad it wouldn't have hurt much."

"But it does hurt to have him whip. At least, it used to hurt me. Do be careful, Puss.

I don't want him to begin whipping you. How did you make him so mad?"

The child briefly recounted the story of the morning's tribulations between bites of biscuit and cheese, growing so angry over her recital that the flood gates were opened again and she sobbed aloud in her tempest of grief.

"It's all on account of my horrid name," she told him. "I just can't be good when folks say such mean things. Joe Pomeroy is a sneak anyway, and I've been itching to lick him for a long, long time—ever since Sneed hit me with the whip he uses to drive the cows with."

"Did Sneed hit you with a whip?"

"Yes. Oh, Tom, I never meant to tell you that! Now you'll go and fight him and he will hurt you, 'cause he's so much bigger than you are, and then Dad will whale you for fighting. Thrash Joe, but don't tackle Sneed. Oh, please!"

Tom laughed ironically. "Hm, what satisfaction would it be to me to thrash someone that *you* have licked, Puss?" he asked.

"Please, Tom, don't touch Sneed," she begged, crying harder than ever; and to still

her sobs, he promised, though in his heart he vowed vengeance.

“How did you happen to go blackberrying without me?” he asked to divert her attention from her anxiety over him. “I thought you wanted me to go with you.”

“Why, you’re so busy at the store that we don’t have time to get more than a handful at night when you can go, and the bushes were just loaded with them just below Pomeroy’s pasture. I never thought about Joe’s being there to tease me. I did want the berries so much, for Aunt Maria said she would make some jelly and some jam if I would pick the berries. She won’t gather ’em ’cause the thorns tear her hands so. I got the pail full—heaped up so they kept tumbling off—and now they are all spoiled and I’ve scratched my hands to pieces all for nothing.”

Tom expected a fresh wail would follow this statement, for though Tabitha was not ordinarily a cry-baby, the day of trials had been too much for her; but he was surprised when after a moment of silence in which he was vainly trying to think of something consoling to say, she remarked, “Well, I don’t know’s I care

much about the berries, 'cause we're going to move, and I s'pose if we had a lot of jelly put up, Dad would say it wasn't any use to take it with us, and we would have to leave it along with the rest of the truck they've been sorting out today."

"Move?" the boy interrupted, as the realization of what she was saying dawned upon him. "Who says we're going to move? What do you mean? They never told me!"

"I heard Dad tell Aunt Maria we would leave the last of the week for the place where he has just come from, and they have been packing all the afternoon."

Tom was silent and in the darkness Tabitha could not see his face, but she seemed to understand how he felt about it, and after a moment she slipped a thorn-scratched little hand into his, as she said,

"You don't like it, do you, Tommy? I'm sorry, too. I wanted to stay here. The people who have moved in the big red house by the pond have two of the nicest children. They are cousins and have the prettiest names—Rosalie Meywood and Rosslyn Fennimore—and they are almost my age. I hated to tell

them my name, but they didn't laugh a bit, Tom. They didn't even *look* queer at each other, and Rosslyn said they had a kitten they called Tabby and it was the smartest cat they ever saw. They have taught it tricks and Rosalie invited me over to see it. I met them down in the blackberry patch. They were picking just for fun and they helped me a little—not much, 'cause they were so slow. Neither of them knows how to pick berries and they took only those out in sight, while the very best ones are most always way in under the vines. We are all in the same classes in school and we planned such nice times together when lessons begin again. I never get to knowing any nice people but we move away. Do you s'pose we will ever have any friends, Tom?"

Tom's thoughts were very busy, and he only half heard the child's lively chatter. In the dim long ago, when he was only six years old, one morning a white-aproned woman with a gentle face had called him to her and led him into a room where lay his own dear mother with a little white bundle on her arm, and when the covers were turned down he had looked into a

tiny, red, wrinkled face with blinking, black eyes and was told that this was a baby sister come to be a playmate for him. Then the nurse went away and left them for a little while and his mother talked to him in her soft voice that he could remember best in the little lullaby she used to sing to him:

“I’m tired now, and sleepy, too,
Come put me in my little bed.”

She had laid the baby’s little fisting hands into his and told him that he must always take good care of little sister. He never saw the mother again, but after days of hushed voices and light steps in the big house, Aunt Maria had come to take care of them, and they moved away to another town.

The baby lived and had grown from year to year until she was now past eight years old, and he had tried his best to take care of her. But she had never known a mother’s love nor a father’s. Oh yes, the father was living. Tom could remember the tall, dark man having once seized him in his arms and pressed passionate kisses upon his lips, but he had never seen him caress the little helpless bundle the mother had left when the angels carried her away.

Sometimes it seemed as if he could faintly recall having heard the father say bitterly to that unconscious babe, "You have killed your mother." And then it seemed as if a woman's voice answered him accusingly, "You killed her yourself when you named the child Tabitha." Tom was fourteen years old now, but some of these memories were so dim that he could not be sure they were really memories and not dreams that had come to him in the night and clung, as so often such fancies do.

There had been no one to ask, for Aunt Maria had not come until later, and even then, she did not talk to the children very much, so he had grown accustomed to thinking of these things just to himself. Tabitha was too young to be made his confidante in such matters; indeed, he could never tell her some things. They would only make her hate the austere father more than ever. So he sighed. This was the fifth time they had moved from one town to another since the mother had died, and each place was worse than the last. No sooner were they well established in one city than the restless spirit seized the father and they moved again. How would it end?

"Do you, Tom? This is the third time I have asked you that."

"I'm sorry, Puss. I was thinking about something else just then. What is it?"

"Do you s'pose we will ever have any friends? Rosalie says next week three of her little friends where they used to live are coming to stay with her until school begins in September; and when she asked me if I ever had any friends come to visit me, I had to tell her I never had any friends. She seemed ever so surprised, and I did want to stay in one place long enough to have some friends. But I s'pose it is my name that keeps folks from being friends with me. No one would want to say, 'My chum's name is Tabitha Catt.' Would they? Everybody would laugh and maybe they would sing:

"Tabby Catt, Tabby Catt,
Drink some milk and make you fat,
Skinny, scrawny Tabby Catt."

Wouldn't that make the friend feel awful? Am I very skinny, Tom?"

Poor Tom! How could he answer the avalanche of questions? At fourteen one is not very wise, but Tom squeezed the rough hand

still holding his, and answered hopefully, "Some day we will have some friends, Pussy. And some day when I get big and can work for you, we will settle down and live in one town, and people will come to see us, and they won't care anything about our names."

Something in his tone made Tabitha say questioningly, "Do you still mind your name, Tom?"

"Not as much as I used to, Puss. Now you must go to bed. It's getting late and pretty soon Dad and Aunt Maria will be coming upstairs. Good-night." With another gentle squeeze of her hand he was gone.

CHAPTER II

TABITHA CHOOSES A NEW NAME

The day was done. The crimson sunset glow still hung over the whole world, touching the brown, parched hills with a rainbow of colors and reflecting itself in the cloudbank massed high in the eastern sky. Tom, hurrying home through the fields from his last errands at the store, was whistling softly and enjoying the beauty of the early evening, wondering all the while why the little sister was not running to meet him, and half expecting to see her jump out at him from behind some clump of bushes. But Tabitha was nowhere in sight.

“Poor Puss! Wonder if she has been punished again today. Wish I could keep her with me all the time. She wouldn’t get into so much mischief.”

He anxiously scanned the house as he approached it for some glimpse of lively Tabitha, but was disappointed. Suddenly from overhead came a soft bird trill, followed by a

suppressed snicker. He looked up quickly, and there in the branches of the wide-spreading sycamore tree by the corner of the house was a flutter of white which, upon closer inspection, proved to be Tabitha's nightgown, and Tabitha was inside it!

"Tab—"

"Sh!" came the instant command. "Eat supper and come up to my room. I've got something to show you."

Tom obediently followed her instructions, and some minutes later his head appeared at the window, and he demanded, "Puss, are you still working for that licking?"

"Nope," she answered serenely. "We don't have to talk in whispers now, for Dad has gone up the road and I heard him tell Aunt Maria he wouldn't be home until late."

"What does this mean? What are you doing out in that tree, and why are you in your nightgown? It's getting damp and you will catch cold sitting out there like that."

"I ain't undressed," came the scornful reply. "I poured a cup of coffee down Dad's collar and burned his neck—oh, I didn't do it on purpose, 'Thomas Catt! 'Twas really his

fault, for he joggled my elbow just as I was reaching up to set it on the shelf to cool. Aunt Maria was going to make coffee cake for supper. But of course he blamed me, and he sent me up to bed again. Reckon he guessed that I didn't put on my nightgown yesterday, for he told me that I had to do it this time and to get into bed. He didn't say I had to undress, though, so I just put on my gown and crawled into bed for a second. That was all he really told me to do, now Tom. I *can't* stay in bed in the daytime, so I came out here to sit. I've got on all my clothes and my nightgown besides, so I won't catch cold on this hot night. Goodness! I should hope not. One time I had a sneezing spell and Aunt Maria made me sit for ages with mullein leaves dipped in hot vinegar stuck onto my feet. Said she was afraid maybe I was going to have a bad cold or a fever. We'd been running races and my face was red and hot."

Tom laughed, though the details of the episode were very fresh in his mind yet. He had escaped a similar fate only because he was so big that the fussy little aunt could no longer force him to take her vile doses.

"Well, what is the wonder you have to show me? I confess I am curious. Have you found another history you didn't know belonged to us, or has one of that missing bunch turned up?"

"Yes, no; it's a Bible." There was a scraping among the branches and through the parted leaves Tom saw a huge volume hanging on a bough in some mysterious manner.

"Goodness gracious, Puss! How did you get that thing out there?"

"I did have quite a time of it," confessed the child, tugging at the heavy book to keep it from slipping out of her hands to the ground below, and at the same time trying to balance herself on the smooth bough. "I guess you will have to pull it in the window again. I have broken its back getting it out here."

"What will Dad say?"

"It was thrown out among the stuff we are going to leave here, so I guess he won't care. I'd like to take it, though, Tom, for it has the loveliest names in it. Just listen here,—'Theodora Marcella Folwell'—ain't that grand? And here's another, 'Gabrielle Flora Folwell'—"

"What in the world are you reading?" asked the puzzled boy, craning his neck out of the window to see what sort of a Bible it could be with such names as these in it.

"Aunt Maria said it was an old Bible that we've carted around for years and it is such a nuisance to move that they don't mean to pack it this time at all. There are a lot of names in the back and some awfully homely pictures. I rubbed my finger on one and it smooched the nose clear off and blurred both eyes, but he wasn't good looking anyway. It isn't much worse now. On one page it says 'Births,' and on another 'Deaths,' and on the third 'Marriages.'"

"Oh!" Tom was suddenly enlightened. "Hold the book fast now and I'll come down where you are and get it. Don't fall."

His instructions were unnecessary. Tabitha's legs were curled around the big bough so tightly that it would have taken a cyclone to dislodge her, and the mammoth Bible hung suspended by its broken back from an adjacent branch in such a fashion that as long as its heavy binding held it could not fall. But it took considerable effort to haul it up into

the house again, and this was finally accomplished only after Tabitha had crawled back through the window to tug at it from above, while Tom pushed at it from below, swaying and bumping in the sycamore until both children held their breath for fear boy and Bible would land in a heap on the ground.

“There!” breathed Tabitha with a sigh of relief when at last the volume lay safe on the wide window-sill. “Now you can see all the names yourself. I never heard such grand ones before. How do you pronounce A-m-a-r-i-a-h? And here’s a perfectly beautiful one D-i-o-n-y-s-i-u-s Carpenter. It has him down under the marriages with Pen-e-lope Miranda Folwell. Don’t you think that is pretty? They are all so different from John and Frank and—and—Thomas and Tabitha. I wish I could pick out a pretty name for my very own and have folks call me that always. Don’t you?”

Tom was intently studying the records penned in faded ink on the yellow pages, and now he raised his head and looked into the eager black eyes upturned to his, as he said slowly,

"Puss, this must be the family Bible that belonged to Mother's folks. I can remember Dad used to call her Dora, and I have an old letter I found in a book a long time ago that has the name Folwell on it. Yes, here's the record. See, Puss? 'Theodora Marcella Folwell and Lynne Maximilian Catt, married Sept. 10th, 18—,' it's blurred so I can't read the rest of it. But that must be Dad. His name is Maximilian, you know, though I never heard the Lynne part of it before."

"Lynne," repeated Tabitha, half to herself. "That might be a pretty name if it belonged to anyone but a Catt man. Lynne Catt—hm! Lean cat. That's what everybody would call him. I bet that's why he used his middle name. I'd rather be nicknamed 'Manx cat' than to be called 'lean cat,' wouldn't you? 'Skinny, scrawny Tabby Catt'—that's what they call me, Tom. My name might as well have been 'Lynne.'"

"Never mind, Puss. When we get moved to Silver Bow, people won't know about that rhyme."

"Maybe they will think up something worse yet. It was bad enough to have the children

of Conroy sing, 'Once there was a little kitty,' and then the folks at Dover used to say, 'Pussy cat, Pussy cat, where have you been?' It gets worse every place we go."

Her lip quivered suspiciously, and Tom hastily changed the subject by asking, "What would you choose for a name if you could take your pick of all the pretty ones you ever heard?"

Tabitha drew a long breath, shook the black hair out of her eyes, folded her lean brown arms across the nightgown, which looked considerably the worse for her climb in the sycamore tree, and hesitated.

"A name could have more than one part, couldn't it?" she finally asked.

"I suppose so; most people have more than one."

"Well, it's rather hard to choose, for I have heard so many names, though never any as grand as these in the Bible. Even 'Rosalie' isn't so grand; do you think so? I—believe—I'd—like—to be called"—Tom waited expectantly as she shifted from foot to foot and tried to make the important decision.—"Theodora Marcella Gabrielle Julianna Victoria

Emeline. Say, Tom, will you call me that? Just when we're alone, of course, so Dad wouldn't hear it."

Tom caught his breath as if a dash of cold water had suddenly struck his face. "Gracious, Puss! I never could remember all that. Say it again, can you?"

"Of course! That's easy, and so pretty. Theodora Marcella Gabrielle Julianna Victoria Emeline. Why, it sounds just like a princess, Tom! I believe I could be good and not get mad all the time if I had a name like that. I *know* I could. I wouldn't envy Rosalie Meywood one bit. Don't you think that is a perfectly grand name, Tom?"

Tom bit his lip to keep from laughing as he soberly answered, "Tip-top, Puss. I'll call you that sometimes—that is, as much of it as I can remember, if you want me to; just in play, you know. Won't Dora be enough?"

"Oh no! Why, that's hardly any of it. Dora is a pretty name, but Theodora is *grand*. If you forget part of it, remember the Theodora Gabrielle part. That is the best of it. Wouldn't you like to have me call you something else besides Tom? There are some aw-

fully nice boys' names written in that Bible. Which did you think were the grandest?"

"Oh, I like Ulysses first rate. That was Gen. Grant's name, you know, and he was a trump. He made some regular splendid fights."

Tabitha was evidently disappointed at his selection, and he hastily asked, "What do you think is the best name for a boy?"

"The *grandest* name I think is Di—what did you call it? Dionysius? Wouldn't Dionysius Ulysses Humphrey Llewelyn be splendid? Or would you like some more? There are six parts to my name—"

"Oh, no," Tom interrupted hastily. "That is long enough for me. Men don't need as many names as girls, I reckon. You may have to remind me what my name is to be, for I am afraid I shall always be forgetting it. Suppose we shorten it to Ulysses. You cut yours down a little, you know."

"That was just so you could remember it, and as I have to do the remembering of your name anyway, I reckon I will call you the whole thing. It's a heap prettier than Thomas Catt."

"Well, all right, Puss; but don't think about

it so much that you will call me that when Dad is around. He won't like it. I think I will keep this Bible, though. Don't tell. I can put it in the bottom of the old trunk where I keep my things and no one will ever know but you."

So he marched away with the precious volume under his arm, and Tabitha crawled happily into bed to dream of grand names and a happy future in the unknown home where they were going.

CHAPTER III

TABITHA ADOPTS HER NEW NAME

“What’s your name?”

Tabitha wheeled with a start, lost her balance, and toppled off the great rock to the hard ground, where she lay staring up at the fair-haired stranger bending over her with anxiety and alarm filling the pretty blue eyes.

“Are you hurt?” inquired the soft voice. “I didn’t mean to make you jump. I’m lonesome and when you moved in the nearest house to ours I was glad to think there was another girl about my size, for maybe you will play with me. Will you?”

Still Tabitha made no reply, but lay as she had fallen, not daring to trust her ears or believe her eyes—it was not unusual for anyone to make friendly advances toward her, though she had longed all her lonely little life for a playmate. Why, it couldn’t be possible! They were on the desert now in a forlorn little mining town located in a hollow between two mountain ranges and straggling over a vast

area of barren, rocky hills, with not a tree in sight anywhere, except the ugly, unpromising yuccas, and they could scarcely be dignified by the name of trees. Nothing but sagebrush, greasewood, mesquite and cactus; not even a sprill of grass!

To poor homesick Tabitha it seemed as if they had dropped off the earth into nowhere. She had never seen such a place in all her life, nor even dreamed that towns like that existed. Wherever they had gone heretofore, there had always been trees and flowers, which in a measure took the place of the friends she had never known but always missed. Now there was not even to be this solace; how could there be any friends?

So she remained silent and the little blue-eyed girl was puzzled, almost frightened. Then a bright idea came to her.

"Are you an Indian?" she asked timidly, wondering if she had better run, supposing the black-eyed child should prove to be the daughter of a redman.

"No, I ain't an Indian!" Tabitha bounced on the ground with a startling suddenness that froze the other child in her tracks.

Poor Tabitha! Tormented ever since she could remember because of her unfortunate name, and now to be called an Indian! She had sprung to her feet with fists clenched and eyes blazing, yet somehow she seemed to understand that this plump little body was different from the teasing children who had made the days miserable for her wherever she went, and she could not strike the avenging blow. But the insult, unintentional as it evidently was, rankled bitterly nevertheless; and dropping to the ground again, she hid her face in her faded skirts.

Instantly two soft arms slipped around her and she heard the gentle voice saying sorrowfully, "Oh, please don't cry, little girl! I didn't mean to make you mad. Of course you aren't an Indian, 'cause your hair curls some, and Indians have awful straight, stiff hair, and they are redder than you are. I guess you've lived on the desert until you are real brown."

"I never lived on the desert before, and I hate it, hate it, hate it! Almost as bad as I do Dad! I ain't crying, and I ain't mad—at you." Tabitha lifted her head and the other child saw two very bright, black, beautiful

eyes in the thin tanned face, but the tears she expected to see were not there.

They sat and stared at each other in silence a moment and then the strange girl said, "My name is Carrie Carson. What's yours?"

"Theodora Marcella Gabrielle Julianna Victoria Emeline Catt."

Carrie gasped. So did Tabitha, but for a different reason. Carrie was amazed at the length of the name and the ease with which its owner spoke it. Tabitha was astonished to think the idea of dropping her own obnoxious name and adopting a new one had never occurred to her before. No thought of deception ever entered her mind; she merely hated "Tabitha" with all the strength of her passionate nature; she had found a name that filled her with delight; she had adopted it at first in play, but it had become very real to her, and now as she spoke the words that were so beautiful to her, it seemed as if they belonged to her.

"How do you ever remember them all?" asked Carrie. "Must people use that whole long name when they speak to you?"

"Not unless they want to," answered Tabi-

tha with restored composure. "Theodora Gabrielle is enough."

"Well, Theodora Gabrielle, have you got any sisters?"

"No, only one brother, To— Dionysius Ulysses Humphrey Llewelyn."

"My! what long names you do have in your family! Will you say it again, please? I couldn't quite make it out."

So Tabitha repeated the words slowly, adding, "*I* always call him all of them, but he would just as soon folks would call him Ulysses. He was named after General Grant who fought in the Civil War. To— Dionysius Ulysses Humphrey Llewelyn taught me how to read, 'cause we move so much that sometimes we miss a lot of school, and I've gone clear through the United States history. Have you?"

"Mercy, no!" ejaculated Carrie in astonishment. "I'm not through with geography yet."

"Oh, I don't s'pose I am, either, but we have three histories and no geographies at our house, so I couldn't read up geography. To— Dionysius Ulysses Humphrey Llewelyn explains when I don't understand, and he draws

maps to show how the battles were fought. We learn poetry about fights, too. To— my brother is going to be a soldier when he gets big.”

The name with which she had so generously supplied her brother was becoming very hard to manage, and she sat silently eyeing her bare feet while she tried in vain to think of some way out of the dilemma. She had told Carrie that she always called her brother his full name. What could she do but prove it?

Carrie's voice interrupted her meditations. “Don't you hate to speak before people—I mean, speak pieces? It always scares me so I forget half of my verses and then papa is so disappointed. Mamma always says, ‘Never mind, dearie,

‘If at first you don't succeed,

Try, try again.’

So I keep on trying and maybe some day I can remember them all right.”

“Oh, I just love to speak!” Tabitha cried. “I've just learned *Barbara Fritchie*, and it is *grand!*

“‘who touches a hair in yon gray head
Dies like a dog! March on!’ he said.”

Carrie clapped her hands. "Oh, say the whole of it, Theodora Gabrielle, please!"

So Tabitha flew to the top of the rock from which she had been surveying the waste of desert when Carrie had first put in appearance, and with ringing voice declaimed the stirring words to her admiring audience.

That was the beginning of the first real friendship poor Tabitha had ever known, and the world that opened before her was a beautiful fairyland. The Carson home was so unlike her own that unconsciously she held her breath whenever she entered the big house where the superintendent of the Silver Legion Mines lived, fearing that she might wake up and find it after all only a dream—the sweet-faced mother who kissed little Carrie every day, the smiling, genial father who always had some pretty gift in his pocket for his only child, the dainty furnishings of the big house which seemed so gorgeously splendid to the neglected girl, and particularly the wonderful toys and story-books that belonged to the flaxen-haired fairy who opened the door of this wonderland for her to enter.

Having never known a mother's love herself,

Tabitha regarded dainty Mrs. Carson with a feeling of awe which deepened into worship as the acquaintance progressed, but proved to be a great barrier between them for a long time. She spoke of her in a hushed voice, treasured every smile as if it had been some precious gem, and hungered for the caresses so freely bestowed upon little Carrie, but feared to approach near enough this beautiful goddess to receive them herself.

Mr. Carson she could understand better. He was another Tom grown up, only where Tom was silent and shy, this man was jolly and friendly. He laughed a great deal, said funny things, never teased little girls except in a playful way that made one like to meet him, and was always very, very kind. She never heard him say a cross word to anyone, and once when she asked Carrie if he ever got mad and punished her, the blue-eyed girl was very indignant.

"My papa is *never* mad," she stoutly declared. "When I do naughty things, he just looks so disappointed and says, 'I am so sorry,' in such a way that it makes me sorry, too."

To Tabitha this seemed a very queer way for a father to act, but for big brother Tom it was perfectly natural; so in her scale of relationship, Mr. Carson slipped down a peg and became a brother, bringing him much closer to her than he would otherwise have been, and making his influence over her much greater.

At first the Carsons did not much favor the friendship that had sprung up between the two girls, for Tabitha seemed so wild and passionate they feared her association with their little daughter might not be for the best; but by chance the superintendent met Tom one day in the surveyor's office, where the boy had found employment running errands and doing other odd jobs, and he was delighted with the unusual intelligence of the lad, as well as with the ambition Tom had for an education.

Like Tabitha, Tom craved fellowship with understanding people, and his appreciation of real kindness was as touching as it was keen. Mr. Carson made inquiry concerning the boy, learned the unfortunate circumstances of his starved life, and became his fast friend. So the two girls were allowed to play together unrestricted, each helping the other unconsciously

in the building of character,—Carrie being taught reliance and self-confidence, while Tabitha was learning to subdue the fierceness of her untamed nature and to overcome her extreme sensitiveness.

Though Mr. Carson knew the truth about the unhappy names of brother and sister, he never so much as smiled, nor did he betray Tabitha's secret; and while he never called Tom by the name she thought so grand, he always addressed her as Theodora Gabrielle; and she was happy.

So for many precious weeks the world looked very bright to the black-eyed girl. The father was miles away most of the time, prospecting among the mountains; Aunt Maria seldom called her anything but Child; Tom's pet name, when he forgot her grand title, was Puss; and she began to think the hateful Tabitha was forever laid aside and forgotten.

The dreariness of the desert which had so oppressed her when they first arrived in Silver Bow slipped from her; she forgot the lack of trees and grass; the yuccas and Spanish bayonets lost their grimness; she grew to like the queer place with its queer vegetation; and the

sunrises and sunsets were a source of intense delight to her, as they are to many another soul—for where in all the world are there such beautiful cloud pictures as on the desert with the mountains beyond, mysterious and wonderful in their purple haze or in the glistening white of the snow?

The Catts arrived at Silver Bow only a few weeks before school began, and owing to the fact that the cottage they had rented stood half hidden from the rest of the town by one of the many hills, with only the Carson house and a vacant bungalow for neighbors, Tabitha made the acquaintance of none of the other children in town until the commencement of the fall term. Usually this was an event to be dreaded by the sensitive girl, but it was with a feeling almost of pleasure that Tabitha accompanied pretty Carrie to the old weather-beaten schoolhouse of the mining camp the first Monday of September for the opening session.

Tom was too far advanced for the branches taught in the little school, so he was to remain with the surveyor and study in the evening under Mr. Carson's direction; but he knew

from former experience what a scene Tabitha usually created before she could be persuaded to begin school each year, and dreaded the ordeal almost as much as did the passionate little sister.

Tabitha had confessed to Tom that Carrie called her by the wonderful name, Theodora Gabrielle, but he thought it was just in play and rejoiced that the superintendent's charming little daughter was so friendly and kind. He was unusually busy with his own thoughts and plans, for Mr. Carson had laid out a course of study for him by which he might prepare himself for college, the goal of his ambitions; and the world was looking very bright to him as well as to Tabitha, so perhaps he was excusable if he day-dreamed a little. But he never forgave himself for relaxing his vigilance over the small sister even in this slight measure, for it cost her many hours of bitter anguish. If only he had inquired about the name Tabitha had adopted, and discovered how real it had become! But intent upon his own thoughts, he missed this part of Tabitha's confession, and watched her set out for school hand in hand with Carrie, serene in the belief

that all was well, and happy at her unexpected behavior in regard to school.

"Well, I'm beat!" Aunt Maria exclaimed as the two girls skipped joyously up the path and disappeared over the summit of the hill. "I thought sure she'd raise a fuss, but she never said a word."

"She is so wrapped up in Carrie that she has forgotten all about her name," answered Tom in his ignorance.

The aunt sighed, "Well, it's a shame she has to answer to it when she despises it so; though I can't see that it is much worse than Maria. I never paid much attention to my name that I remember. But if I'd had my way about it, I should have called you Peter Augustus, and her Aurora Isadena," (she pronounced them "A-roo-rie Isi-deen-ie") "but your pa had different notions. Said he'd suffered torment all his days being called Manx Cat and he was going to get even with folks for once; though I can't see how naming innocent children such names would help him any in his grouch against the world."

Neither could Tom, but it was seldom that Aunt Maria volunteered any information of

this sort, and he made the most of his opportunity by asking, "Is Dad's other name Lynne?"

"Yes, but the boys plagued him when he was little calling him 'lean cat,' so he took to going by his middle name, Maximilian, but folks nicknamed that, too, and he got sulky." Then as if fearing she had said too much, she added, "That assaying man will be looking for you if you don't get up to the office pretty quick."

So though Tom had any quantity of questions he wanted to ask, he put on his cap and left the house. The school-bell was ringing its final summons when he reached the top of the hill, and he paused to look down the steep slope into the yard where the children were marching in double file into the building, smiling as he saw Tabitha's long, lean legs keeping step behind the short, plump ones of little Carrie, and mentally hoping that the day would go well with the little spitfire sister.

It did. A bright-faced woman stood at her desk and received the children as they entered, shook hands with them and gave them their seats, smiling all the while until Tabitha thought she had never seen anyone so pretty, except Mrs. Carson.

"Now children, my name is Miss Brooks," the new teacher began with an important air which would have told an older observer that this was her first experience in teaching. "I shall expect you always to address me in that manner. If I ask you a question, you must say, 'Yes, Miss Brooks,' or 'No, Miss Brooks,' for that is polite. Now, the first thing I intend to do this morning is to take down your names and get you classified. This little girl in the front seat of the outside row, what is your name?"

"Theodora Marcella Gabrielle Julianna Victoria Emeline Catt, Miss Brooks." Tabitha responded in one breath without a break, her voice ringing clearly through the silence of the room, for everyone was craning to see the new scholar and listening to catch her name.

The teacher gasped, the children tittered, and Tabitha crimsoned angrily, but before she had even time to clench the little fists that were accustomed to fight her battles, Carrie saved the day. "That's her whole name, Miss Brooks, but we call her just Theodora Gabrielle. She is a lovely speaker."

The flush of annoyance on the teacher's face

died instantly, and she smiled down into the beautiful eyes of the child before her as she said, "That is a very pretty name, I am sure. Now tell me where you are in your studies."

An answering smile came to Tabitha's face, and she replied with more confidence, "I've finished United States history, which is grand, 'specially Grant; I've reached Europe in geography, which isn't bad; I've got to 'emotion' in language, which is horrid; and in 'rithmetic I am stuck in decimal fractions, which is the worst yet. My brother, Dionysius Ulysses Humphrey Llewelyn, taught me history when he was studying it. I hain't had it in school yet."

This time the scholars as well as the teacher were silent in astonishment, but no one laughed; and seeing the surprised faces all around her, Tabitha again assumed a belligerent attitude, thinking they did not believe her.

"Well, that's so," she exclaimed defiantly, glaring at the strange children.

"Yes," added Carrie, "and she has read through the Fourth Reader and knows lots of pieces. You ought to hear her speak *Barbara Fritchie*."

"But I'm an awful speller," admitted the mollified Tabitha.

At this the teacher smiled again, and laying her hand on the black head she said, "You are a little girl to be so far along in your lessons. I am afraid I can't classify you just now. We will have to wait until I get the other girls and boys arranged according to studies, and then we will see where to put you. Now, children, I hope you will follow Theodora Gabrielle's example and study hard."

"Teacher's pet," whispered the boy across the aisle, but Tabitha was soaring in the realms of bliss and the teacher's smile, so she did not hear or care what the others might say. The world was growing very bright and she was finding how sweet the days could be.

CHAPTER IV

THE NAME CAUSES TABITHA TROUBLE

“Tabitha!”

The child was curled in a forlorn heap on the little front stoop which took the place of piazza to their cottage, staring with gloomy eyes toward the radiant sunset, but for once unaware of the glorious beauty of the skies. Her heart was very heavy. In two days more the school was to give their first exhibition—that was what Miss Brooks called it—in the town hall; and all the parents and friends were invited to come and hear them speak the pieces and sing the songs they had been learning ever since school had commenced, six weeks before. Miss Brooks thought it helped the scholars to have public exercises occasionally, for it brought the parents in closer touch with their boys and girls and encouraged the children to do better work; so she had planned to have these exhibitions every six weeks or two months in the *town hall*. The school house was

too small to seat many visitors if all the scholars were present.

Tabitha was to recite a long selection all by herself, and she had taken great pride in learning it with appropriate gestures, conscious of the fact that she was the best speaker in the room, and happy in the teacher's unstinted praise and her playmates' envious admiration.

But now! Miss Brooks had asked the girls to wear white dresses, and Tabitha had none! What a calamity! She had expected to wear her new green gingham. It wasn't a very pretty color, to be sure, or very becoming, but she had coaxed Aunt Maria to make it after the fashion of Carrie's dainty dresses and was delighted with the result. Now the rest of the girls would be in white, and it would look dreadful to have one green dress in the splendid array on the platform. What could she do?

It was useless to ask for a white gown, and even if there were any possibility of getting the new material it was too late to make it up in time for the exhibition, for Aunt Maria wasn't a great success as a seamstress, and it took her a long time to make a dress. Why,

she had worked more than a week on the green gingham, and that was just tucked! If there could be a white dress it would have to have ruffles on it; all the other girls' white dresses had ruffles on them somewhere. Carrie's had two ruffles on the skirt, and Mamie Cole's had *three*. Bertha Dean's had only one ruffle around the shoulders and the skirt was tucked, but it was very pretty; and if Tabitha could not have ruffles on the skirt, she would want at least a shoulder ruffle with lace around it. Well, there was no use in planning, she could not have a white dress. But how could she face all those people in a green gingham and be the only odd girl there?

"Tabitha Catt!" The voice was sharp and insistent, and at the sound of the hateful name almost forgotten now, the child came suddenly out of her unhappy reverie.

"What is it, Aunt Maria?"

"Where in the world have you been? I've called you half a dozen times already. Go to my trunk and bring me that box of odd pieces just under the tray. I want to mend this dress before dark. Mind you are careful now. The tray is broken; lift it carefully."

Tabitha rose slowly to do her bidding, still thinking of the dress she did not have. Under ordinary circumstances she considered it a great honor to be allowed even to lift the cover of the big, old trunk in the corner, for it contained many wonderful relics for childish eyes, and sometimes Aunt Maria would let her look at some of the treasures, and even tell her a little about them on rare occasions. Today, however, even this prospect was not alluring, and with listless hands Tabitha pulled the rickety tray out of its place and bent over the trunk in search of the box in question. There were several boxes under the tray, but Aunt Maria never remembered this, and it was always necessary to open them to discover which was the one wanted. So the child seized the nearest and pulled off the cover. No pieces in that. But in the act of replacing the cover she noticed something shining in a mass of white, and paused to investigate. It was a string of glistening beads, and as she lifted them from their crushed tissue wrappings there lay disclosed the shimmering folds of a white silk dress, carefully laid away with dried "Sweet Mary" leaves.

"Child, are you making those pieces?" The girl started guiltily, dropped the cover over the box and pulled open its neighbor. There were the scraps Aunt Maria wanted, and with these in her hands she scurried out into the kitchen where the fussy old lady sat sewing in the waning light.

"There are seven boxes just under the tray, Aunt Maria," she announced. "I opened the wrong one by mistake, and there was a silk dress inside." She hesitated, not knowing how to ask for the information she desired, for the aunt, like the father, never encouraged the asking of questions.

"That was my first silk dress," the woman said reminiscently. "My grandfather gave it to me when I was a little girl so I could go to my favorite aunt's wedding. I never wore it but twice, for my mother did not believe in finery for children, and this being white, she was afraid it would get soiled. Did you close that trunk?"

Tabitha went back to put things in order again, but could not resist one more peep at the enticing box. How beautiful the silk looked, and how daintily it was made! To be

sure, there were no ruffles adorning the soft folds, but the bottom of the skirt was beautifully scalloped, so even and nice, and each scallop bound with a narrow strip of the same material.

She lifted the dress out of its box and looked at it with shining eyes. How rich one must be to own a silk dress! How she wished it belonged to her! If it had been hers, she should have worn it more than twice—such a dainty, pretty thing as that—and it was white. White? Yes. And she wanted a white dress so much.

“Tabitha!”

“Yes, Aunt Maria.”

“What are you doing? I want you to set the table. It is almost supper time and Thomas will soon be here.”

Tabitha dropped the dress hastily on the rug beside the trunk, put the cover on the empty box and slipped it back in its place with the other six. Down went the tray on top of them, the lid of the trunk fell with a snap, and the white silk dress was no longer inside. With beating heart and red face she carried the garment into her own tiny room and hung it in

the very darkest corner of the closet. Then she ran to set the table.

How the next day ever passed she never knew, for before her eyes wherever she looked danced that lovely, quaint old gown of shimmering silk, and she could think of nothing else. It hid the map of Europe when she opened her geography, it played leap-frog among common fractions when she tried to do her sums, it waved at the head of the Continental Army while she led those brave men to victory, and when it came to spelling class she could think of nothing but "s-i-l-k."

But Exhibition Day came at last. Aunt Maria was not going, as Tabitha well knew, so would not see her in the borrowed gown until too late to raise any objections. She had no intention of wearing the dress without Aunt Maria's knowledge, but she did intend to wear it first, and tell about it afterwards, accepting whatever punishment the woman saw fit to give her for the transgression. So she smuggled the gown out of the house in her school-bag, and up among the tall boulders beyond the Carson place, where there was no possibility of anyone finding her. Here she

dressed, and under one great rock hid the once admired but now despised green gingham. Then with her long cape covering her quaintly gowned figure, she hurried up to Carrie's door to call for her playmate, having waited until the last minute in the hope that her friends would be gone. Nor was she disappointed. The doors were locked and no one came to answer her knock; so with flying feet she sped toward the hall, noting that only a few people were bound in that direction, and knowing that most of the expected visitors were already seated within.

"Oh, Theodora Gabrielle!" exclaimed the teacher as the child flew up the aisle to her place on the platform, "I was so afraid something had happened to keep you away. It would never do to have our best speaker absent, you know;" and she smiled into the shining black eyes of the breathless Tabitha; but the next instant the smile faded. Tabitha had loosened her cape, and Miss Brooks caught sight of the quaint, queer old gown underneath. "Child!" she cried involuntarily. "Whatever possessed you to put on that rig?"

The beloved silk dress called a "rig!" Tabi-

tha was dismayed, and the tears came welling into the bright eyes, as with quivering lip she confessed, "It was the only *white* dress I could get, Miss Brooks. I thought it would be very 'propriate, for I am to speak a war piece, you know. Aunt Maria had this when she was a little girl, and she must be pretty much older than the war."

"I meant that the silk was too good for common wear, dear," fibbed the teacher, seeing the sorrow in the thin, brown, wistful face. "It is a pretty idea to wear a dress that was made in war times, and I never would have thought of it myself. But we must take off the ribbons from your hair, Theodora, and fix it in the old-fashioned way to go with your gown. I remember a picture of my mother with her hair done in the queerest braids. Come, we will have to hurry."

As this inspiration flashed through the young teacher's mind, she saw a way out of the dilemma so that neither child nor school should be ridiculed because of Tabitha's mistake; and she hurriedly completed the small girl's "war times toilette" so that when Tabitha emerged from under her skillful hands she was the ad-

miration and envy of all her mates. And truly she presented a pretty picture as she stood before the none too critical audience and recited *Sheridan's Ride* with such vim and spirit that every heart was fired with patriotism and the applause was so prolonged that Miss Brooks told her she must speak another piece, even though it was not on the program. Purposely the teacher had left Tabitha's part in the exercises well toward the last, knowing that she could be depended upon to make a fitting climax for the afternoon's program, nor was she disappointed; and she fairly beamed upon the little girl as she gently pushed her toward the front of the platform to respond to her encore.

Having done so well with one war piece, Tabitha decided that *Barbara Fritchie* was a most appropriate selection to recite this second time, besides being quite in keeping with her old-fashioned dress. So she began the familiar lines:

Up from the meadow rich with corn
Clear in the cool September morn,

The clustered spires of Frederick stand
Green-walled by the hills of Maryland.

How she loved that poem, how vividly the whole scene seemed to lie before her, and how her very soul thrilled as she gave life to the stirring words!

Quick, as it fell, from the broken staff
Dame Barbara snatched the silken scarf.

She leaned far out on the window-sill,
And shook it forth with a royal will.

Suddenly from among the audience one face seemed to leap before her eyes,—white, set, terrified. Tom! And beside him, leaning forward as he stood near the door, his face grim and threatening, was her father! Her surroundings were forgotten; she seemed to be standing beside the dusty road again with a pail of blackberries at her feet; and with gaze rivetted upon those two figures in the back of the hall, she recited:

Slap, if you dare, you old gray head,
I'll scratch like a—cat—till you'll wish you
were dead.

Was there a titter behind her, were the faces in the audience smiling? Was Miss Brooks speaking her name, were someone's arms

around her trying to drag her to her seat? It seemed an age that she stood there, words frozen on her lips, heart that seemed to have ceased its beating, and eyes that looked without seeing. Then, pausing for neither hat nor cape, she plunged down from the platform, fled blindly through the aisle and rushed out of the open door.

Up the rocky path she stumbled, but stopped on the summit of the first rise. What was the use of running away? He would find her and the punishment would come sooner or later. It might as well come now and be over with. Up on the nearest boulder she crept and waited, a heap of frozen misery. Would he remain until the exercises were over? How would he punish her?

The waiting was short, although to her it seemed hours before the parents and children came out of the hall and dispersed to their various homes. A few passed her on the trail, but she did not see them—not even Carrie, sobbing aloud as she stumbled along beside her mother.

When they were all gone, her father suddenly stood before her. When he came, or how he got there, she did not know.

"Tabitha Catt," she heard his even tones saying, "get down from there."

She slid to the ground beside him.

"Come with me."

She turned and followed him, not down the hill to the cottage as she had expected, but back towards town. The day was warm, but she was shivering violently, and even her teeth chattered until it seemed as if the silent man at her side could not fail to hear them.

"What have you told these people your name was?" the same even tones demanded.

"Theodora Marcella Gabrielle Julianna Victoria Emeline. I never told anyone but Carrie and Miss Brooks."

A glimmer of a smile played around the man's stern mouth, hidden by his moustache.

"And Tom's? What name did you give Tom?"

"Dionysius Ulysses Humphrey Llewelyn."

"Hm, not as long as yours."

"He thought it would do. I had some more he might have had."

"So he called himself that jargon, did he?"

"Oh, no! He couldn't remember them. That was just my name for him."

"Well, Miss Tabitha Catt, you have told these people a lie."

Lie? Tabitha was startled. Lie? Was it a lie to change one's name—just one's first name? It had not appealed to her in that light before. But the relentless voice was still speaking. What was it saying?

"You have stolen your aunt's dress—"

"I—"

"Not a word yet, Tabitha Catt. When I have finished, you will have a chance to explain. You are to go to every store and hotel in this town and say—listen now, so you will get it straight, 'I told you a lie. My name is Tabitha Catt and not Theodora Marcella Gabrielle Julianna Victoria Emeline; and my brother's name is Thomas Catt and not Dionysius Ulysses Humphrey Llewelyn.' Now go, and don't you miss a single store."

The child's black eyes flashed dangerously, but she obediently started down the main street of the town, counting on her fingers, "Two drug stores, three grocery stores—no, four—one butcher shop, two dry goods stores, one millinery shop, three hotels and the bakery."

The first in line was a hotel, Silver Bow Hotel, the largest in town, and the office was crowded when she entered. Every head was lifted and every pair of eyes looked curiously at the odd little figure in its quaintly scalloped dress and shining black braids. She hesitated, looked about her in desperation, saw no familiar face in all the crowd, and haltingly began her dreadful speech:

"I told you a lie. My name is Tabitha Catt—" Someone interrupted with a mocking laugh. She wheeled toward him, shook her tightly clenched fist, and with blazing eyes continued, "and not Theodora Marcella Gabrielle Julianna Victoria Emeline; and my brother's name is Thomas Catt and not Dionysius Ulysses Humphrey Llewelyn. My father's name is Lynne Maximilian Catt, but you can call him 'lean Manx Catt;' he doesn't like it, but it ain't any worse than ours. I have an Aunt Maria." She turned as if to go, but paused to throw back over her shoulder, "My mother's name was Theodora Marcella. She was a decent woman. The good die young." With a profound bow she was gone before the spell-bound group had recovered their breath.

The next place was a grocery store, and though near the supper hour, it chanced to be empty, except for the proprietor, whom she knew, and with him for her audience she spoke her little piece again, omitting none of it, and leaving him in a state of utter bewilderment. On down the long street she went, into every store and shop. Sometimes the people laughed at her, but more often absolute silence greeted her speech, for her eyes burned like live coals and her thin face was pale as death, except for a scarlet spot high on either cheek. In one shop she saw Miss Brooks, but though the teacher pitied the child with all her heart, and longed to comfort her, she knew this was no time to say anything, and was silent with the rest.

So at last the terrible ordeal was over and Tabitha dragged her feet wearily up the last slope toward home. Her father met her where she had left him, and greeted her with the remark, "Now, what have you to say for yourself, Tabitha Catt?"

She lifted her eyes full of scorching scorn and looked straight into his face so like her own, as she replied with passionate emphasis,

"That you're a beast, lean Manx Catt, and I'm ashamed of you!"

"She's right," he said to himself, and in silence followed the fleeing form through the sunset glow toward home.

CHAPTER V

TABITHA IS COMFORTED

Tom had preceded her to the house and evidently had told Aunt Maria, for when the child burst into the kitchen trailing the green gingham which she had picked up on her way, the worthy woman said never a word of reproach, but with trembling fingers helped her out of the queer little rig and laid it away herself among its crumpled wrappings, while down her withered cheek stole two tears of pity for the unhappy Tabitha.

"Supper is all ready. Come and have something to eat. I opened a jar of jam just for you."

Tabitha shook her head, but gave her aunt a grateful look as she rushed away to her room, slammed the door and crawled into bed, where she lay trembling with anger and humiliation too great for tears. The beauty of the day was gone, her pride in her school achievements was ruthlessly swept away, happiness in these new surroundings was dead.

Her father had said she lied, he had made her tell everyone so, they would hate her now and have nothing to do with her, or else they would make the days miserable by rude taunts and hateful jeers as the children in other towns had done. Miss Brooks would be disappointed in her and give her only cold looks and maybe cross words. Probably even Carrie would no longer care to be her friend. At this thought the tears came, hot, passionate and bitter, and she sobbed convulsively under the pillow where she hid her head that no one might hear. It seemed as if her heart would break. Poor little Tabitha!

Outside the sunset colors faded, the twilight deepened and night came on. The birds twittered sleepily in their nests, a night-hawk screeched across the sky, in the distance the coyotes howled dismally, and the ceaseless throbbing of the mines filled the desert quiet.

In the kitchen Aunt Maria clattered nervously around, upset dishes, spilled the tea, burned the toast and forgot the potatoes entirely, for her perplexed thoughts were with the sobbing child in bed; and the minute the remnants of the evening meal were cleared

away, the woman vanished into her room for the night.

Tom tried to eat his supper, but the food choked him, and finding rest impossible at the house, he went out of doors and up the slope to the office, hopeful of finding work there to take his attention; but the door was locked. He turned toward town with its dim, scattered lights, but they mocked him, and everywhere he looked he saw only the strained face of terrified Tabitha, seeming to reproach him for his relaxed vigilance, and he blamed himself bitterly for the calamity the day had brought upon her. At last he crept home again and went to bed, where in the anguish of his spirit, boy though he was, he dampened the pillow with a few salty tears.

But strange as it may seem, Mr. Catt had the worst time of all. For the first time in all his selfish life he seemed to see things as they really were and to realize, in a measure, what a failure he had made of his fatherhood. His slumbering conscience was roused and for a few hours he had an uncomfortable struggle with himself; but though he regretted his harshness, the habits of a lifetime are not laid

aside in a moment, and in the end he regarded himself as more sinned against than sinning.

If only Fortune had favored him as it had some other people—if only his wife had been spared him—if only friends had been true to him, it might have been different. Maybe he had been too severe with the girl, but she must be taught obedience. She was too much of a spitfire already, and there was no telling what she might do if some restraint was not put upon her. Still, perhaps a lighter punishment would have served the purpose just as well. She was a bright child; yes, he would admit that. Maybe if she had looked a little more like the angel mother—and yet sometimes he could scarcely bear to look at the boy because in Tom's face he saw so often the warm tenderness that had endeared the mother to all who knew her, and the deep, soft brown eyes that always looked straight in one's face seemed to reproach him for his sternness and neglect. He had mourned because the boy had not inherited the black hair and eyes and the disposition of the Catts, and now he was sorry because the girl had. He sighed; if only—

From the next room came a deep, heavy, sobbing sigh, as if an echo of his. Tabitha had at last fallen asleep and in her slumber had tossed aside the suffocating pillow from her hot, throbbing head. He sat looking at the closed door for some minutes; then, hardly knowing why he did so, he rose and entered her room.

She was still lying in a huddled heap, face down upon the mattress, but her head was turned to one side, exposing the flushed, tear-stained cheek and swollen lids where the tears were scarcely dry. One thin arm was still curved beneath her head, but the other had slipped away from her face and lay stretched across the covers, the hand still loosely clutching a damp ball of handkerchief. The pathetic little figure, still quivering convulsively with every breath, touched the heart of the selfish man, and drawing a five-dollar gold piece from his pocket he slipped it inside the moist, brown fist. Then, as if realizing what a paltry thing gold is in comparison with love, he stooped over the flushed face and kissed it gently,—the first kiss he had ever given his little daughter. She stirred, and the coin slipped

from her hand, but in his hasty retreat from the room he did not hear it fall to the floor, roll across the light matting and lodge in a crack out of sight. So he stilled the small, inner voice, and going to his room sought his couch almost satisfied with himself.

The next morning when Tabitha awoke he was gone again, back to the mines and their alluring gold, little realizing what a sore heart he had left behind him in the cottage on the desert. At first she could not think what had happened to leave such a heavy weight on her heart that the very atmosphere seemed charged with grief, but as she rubbed the sleep from her eyes, still hot and stinging from her cry, she remembered the whole dreadful story, and in the sympathetic pillow she again buried her face, too humiliated to meet the world, too discouraged to care.

She heard the clock on the mantel strike seven and lay dreading the call to get up. In the kitchen Aunt Maria was busy bustling about the morning work, getting breakfast, washing the dishes and sweeping. Once she heard Tom's voice, but though she strained her ears, she could catch the sound of no answering tones.

The clock struck eight. Aunt Maria never let her stay in bed that late, even on Sundays, when they all slept a little longer than usual. There was a knock at the kitchen door. Could it be Carrie on her way to school? Not very likely, as the Carson house was nearer town than their cottage, and it was always her place to call for Carrie. Besides, Carrie was never ready on time, and they always had to hurry to reach school before the last bell rang. Still, she held her breath expectantly when steps approached her door, and her heart sank when they stopped and no one entered.

Carrie? What could she be thinking of—she, who had told a lie, deceived people? Could she expect Carrie to call for her? Could she expect Carrie to be her friend after all that had happened? Down went her head into the pillow again and the hot tears flowed in a bitter flood.

The screen door banged, Tom had gone to work. The clock struck nine. There came another knock at the door, louder than the previous one, and for a long time she could hear Aunt Maria's voice speaking in low tones to someone who evidently stood on the steps outside.

Somewhere a sharp whistle sounded, and she flew up in bed startled to hear the clock on the mantel counting off the hour of twelve. She must have been asleep. Yes, she surely had been, for on the chair beside her bed stood a tray heaped high with bread and butter, cake and jam. A glass of milk was there also, and she drank it eagerly, for she was thirsty; but she could not touch the food.

So the long day passed. Once Tom slipped in and bent over her, but her eyes were closed, and thinking her asleep, he left a golden orange beside her and went away. Once Aunt Maria asked her if she didn't feel able to dress and go out of doors for the fresh air, but she turned wearily away and hid her face in the pillow, her only refuge.

The second morning someone had left her door ajar, and she heard Aunt Maria say to Tom, "I don't know what in the world to do with her. She will be sick if she stays that way much longer."

And in Tabitha's heart sprang the fierce longing to be sick, very sick, so sick that they would have to take her away from this horrible

desert town. She had heard of such things happening; perhaps—

Tom's voice interrupted her thoughts.

"It is all my fault, Aunt Maria. She told me about the name, but I didn't pay enough attention to know that she had really taken it in place of her own. *I* ought to be thrashed instead of her being punished. Now she won't look at me or listen to me any more."

Tom took all the blame! Why, she had never for a moment thought of such a thing! It *wasn't* his fault, she would tell him so.

"Tom!"

The scraping of his chair as he pushed it back from the table drowned the sound of her voice, and before she could call again he was gone. She jumped out of bed, threw on her clothes, and stopping only long enough to brush back her tangled hair, she rushed out of the house and up the hill toward the office of the surveyor.

Tom was standing by the big draughting table lettering a map, the surveyor was busy with some blueprints in the window, and Mr. Carson sat near by with a notebook in hand which he was searching industriously. All this

Tabitha saw as she stumbled over the threshold, but without heeding either of the two men, she cast herself into Tom's arms with the wail, "O, Tom, you ain't to blame, and you don't deserve to be thrashed! I told a lie and I stole the white silk dress with those lovely scallops. But those were such grand names—yours 'specially, though mine was longer—and oh, I hate being a cat all my life! I said more'n Dad gave me to say and I told folks that his name was 'lean Manx Catt,' and I told 'em Aunt Maria's name. Miss Brooks won't like me any more, and I expect Carrie will hate me, too."

There was a stifled exclamation—she thought from Tom—then two strong arms closed around her, and she found herself crying into someone's vest pocket, but it wasn't Tom's. He had not yet attained the dignity of vests. Surprised, she hushed her sobs, though she still clung to the protecting arms, and in a moment she heard Tom say, "She will be all right now, sir. I will take her home."

But the big arms only held her closer and Mr. Carson's voice, trembling a little and husky with emotion, replied, "I want her for a little while, Tom. Leave her with me."

Laying aside the notebook with its fascinating rows of figures, the man led the amazed child out of the building and down the steep rocky path toward the Carson home, holding her hand fast in his own, and speaking gently, cheerily as they walked.

"It was all a mistake, little girl, and everyone makes mistakes. It wasn't a lie and it wasn't stealing. You ought to have asked someone about it and everything would have been all right, but you mustn't cry about it any more. Carrie loves you just the same and so does Mother Carson and so do I. I don't think Tabitha is a horrid name—"

"But Tabitha *Catt*!" quavered the tearful little voice. "Folks make fun of me and say hateful things and call me Tabby Catt—"

"Tabby cats are such nice pets," the man interrupted, "so gentle and nice and pretty."

"But I'm homely. If I was pretty maybe they wouldn't call me names."

"No, dear, it isn't that. When they plague you, you scratch; and so they like to tease. If you paid no attention to the thoughtless things they said, they would soon stop teasing."

"Do you really think they would? I

thought it was because of the name. No one teased me much when my name was Theodora Marcella Gabrielle Julianna Victoria Emeline."

He smiled. The name sounded so perfectly incongruous for that slender slip of girl, more so than the despised Tabitha; but he understood what a charm the long, rhythmic words held for the child who had missed so much happiness in her short life, so he gravely answered,

"I am sure if you try to laugh with those who make fun of you, and won't get mad no matter what they say, they will soon forget all about the odd little name and will love you for what you are."

"That will be awfully hard to do," sighed Tabitha, thinking of the many times she had been tormented because of that name, "but if—you think it will work,—I'll try."

Before he had a chance to say anything further, the door of the Carson house flew open and happy-faced Carrie flew up the path to meet them, crying joyously, "Miss Brooks is here, and she wants to see you, 'cause we've missed you dreadfully at school."

CHAPTER VI

A DOG AND A CAT

"Oh, Tabitha, Tabitha, come over to my house and see what papa has brought me!"

Carrie's voice was shrill with joy; and hastily setting the last cup on the pantry shelf, Tabitha seized her sunbonnet and rushed away to join her excited playmate. "It's out here on the back porch, and oh, it's a perfect darling! Tell me what to call him. Isn't he a beauty?"

Talking and laughing and capering in delight, Carrie led the way to the rear of the house, and there in a box on the steps was a beautiful, black, shaggy pup, with the longest, silkiest hair and the prettiest brown eyes.

"Oh, Carrie Carson, aren't you the luckiest girl!" cried Tabitha, looking enviously at the treasure as she bent over it to smooth the soft, shaggy coat. "Just see what beau-ti-ful ears he has! And what a cunning nose! See him lick my hand!"

"He's kissing you. Isn't he cute? One of papa's men at the mine owned four of these little pups, and he sold this one for five dollars. He is to be my very own and I am going to teach him tricks when he is old enough. Isn't he a darling?"

"I should say he is! I wish he belonged to me." The black eyes grew very wistful and the brown face unusually sober as she examined this new toy, this live toy that could really play with its little mistress and understand, at least in a measure, whatever was said to it.

Carrie saw the longing glance and promptly said, "You can play with him, too, Puss, and help me teach him things,—to speak when he wants something to eat, and to bring us sticks or stones when we throw them for him to chase, and to jump through barrel hoops, and to shake hands, and to walk on his hind legs like Jimmy's dog, Sport, does, and to play sleep, and to stand on his hind legs—"

"That will be ever so nice, but it isn't the same as if he was mine, Carrie," interrupted the mournful Tabitha, completely wrapped up in this tiny specimen of puppyhood.

"No—that's so," answered the other child

thoughtfully, watching the precious possession with jealous eyes as it curled up in Tabitha's arms and shut its eyes for a nap.

"He likes me already, doesn't he? I've always wanted a pet, but we've never stayed long enough in one place to have anything of this kind. I had a rabbit once, but a dog caught it, and I cried so hard Aunt Maria said I never should have another."

"I'll tell you what! Part of this dog can be yours," said Carrie generously, though it cost her an effort to speak those words.

"Oh, Carrie, you don't mean that?" cried the astonished Tabitha. "Really own part of your beautiful pup? What will your father and mother say?"

"They won't care a bit. The dog is all mine to do what I like with, and I like to give you a share of him. Course he will live here, and I will feed him, so papa can tell me what to give him, as pups are very hard to raise properly and it takes someone that knows how to do it. But you can really, truly own half of him."

"What a good girl you are, Carrie!" exclaimed the other part owner, much impressed

at Carrie's grand air of knowledge. "If I had a dog all my own, I'm afraid I'd never want to share him with anyone else, except to play with. I'd want to keep all the ownership myself."

"Well, it would be different with you. All the pets you ever have had was a bunny, while I've had a Shetland pony until we came up here on the desert where there isn't anything for him to eat, and a little lamb out on grandma's farm, and two brown hens, and a pair of doves, and three kitties, and this makes the second dog."

"Oh!"

"That's a lot of pets to have one person own, isn't it? But they didn't all belong to me at the same time, and this dog is the best of them all—except the pony. Dear little Arrow is at grandma's house now and when I go back to town to live, if I'm not too big I am to have her again."

"What a cute name for a pony! What are you going to call this pup?"

"I had thought of Ponto, but papa says he will grow up into a big dog, and he thought General would be a nice name."

"I like Ponto best, I believe. It has a grander sound to it than General. And yet—can I name my half of the dog, too?" as a sudden inspiration came to her mind.

"Why—yes—if it fits in with General," a little doubtfully, for Carrie's ideas of beautiful names differed materially from Tabitha's.

"It will go with it splendidly—Sheridan Sherman Grant McClellan."

"Which one?"

"All of them. That ain't too many, is it? I do like all those generals so much, and I should hate to have to drop any of them."

"It's an awfully long name to say when you want to call a dog," said the first little mistress reflectively, yet afraid to suggest the curtailing of it for fear of wounding her playmate.

"But you can shorten it up like—like I did once with—" The unhappy episode was still very fresh in her mind, and her heart still very sore; so she hesitated, unwilling to recall it further.

"I know," interrupted sympathetic Carrie hastily. "We can shorten it to General Sheridan or General—what would you shorten it to?"

“General McClellan is the grandest sounding name, but General Grant is the easiest to say, and I suppose a dog ought to be called the easiest name so he can remember it. We’ll call him General Grant.”

The dog was named.

That evening Tabitha was sitting on the steps studying her geography when Tom came home late for supper, but every moment or two she would look up from her books toward the Carson house, and stare intently at something he could not see, while she seemed to be listening for something he could not hear. From his seat at the table he could watch her unobserved, and when at last he had satisfied his appetite, he joined her on the steps, asking curiously, “What’s the matter, Puss? Geography doesn’t seem to be interesting you.”

“Oh, Tom, it’s the pup! Carrie has the dearest little shaggy dog. She said I might be part owner of it, and we’ve named him General Sheridan Sherman Grant McClellan. General is her name for him, and the rest is mine. It’s most too long to say the whole of it every time we want him to come, so we are

going to call him General Grant for short. Isn't that a nice name?"

"Well, I should say so. The General no doubt would be flattered if he could know."

"He's an awfully pretty pup and will make a great big dog when he's grown up. His feet are dreadfully big, but Mr. Carson says he will need them some day, and all big dogs have big feet when they are little. Carrie wanted to name him Ponto, but her father thought General sounded more dignified for such a big dog. Ponto is a pretty name, though, and if I had a pup all of my own I'd call him— Say, Tom, do you suppose Dad would let me have a dog for my very own self? It's nice to own part of one, but think how much better it would be if I had a whole one. Then Carrie wouldn't have to share hers, and I really think she would rather own all of General Grant herself. If I asked Dad, do you suppose he would say yes?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Puss, but I am afraid not. We had a pup once when I was small, and it chewed up everything it could get hold of. I had a little suit of black velvet—I remember it was the first I ever had with pock-

ets in it—and one day the pup got hold of it and tore it all to pieces. Dad gave him away at last because he did so much damage.”

“What was its name?”

“Pinto.”

“Why, isn’t that funny—almost the name Carrie wanted! If I had a dog, Tom, I should name him Pinto Ponto Poco Pronto. Wouldn’t that be grand? I never heard anything called that, and it has such a pretty jingle about it when you say them all together. It’s a—what do you call it?—’literation? It means where a whole string of words begin with the same letter. Don’t you think that would make a splendid name for a dog?”

“Capital,” answered loyal Tom, and Tabitha again took up the study of her geography lesson, for while she had been talking, Mr. Carson had opened the door of the big house and carried General Grant, box and all, inside.

Tom was not the only one who had heard Tabitha’s raptures over the new possession, however. Sitting by the open window behind his newspaper, Mr. Catt had caught every word of the conversation, unknown to his small daughter, who did not realize his close proxim-

ity while she was unburdening her heart to the big brother; and he smiled derisively at the narrative; so when the child found courage to ask him for a pet dog he answered curtly, "No, Miss Tabitha, we don't want any pups around here. Dogs and cats fight, you know."

Without another word, the small suppliant went mournfully away to gaze with longing eyes at the joint possession and wish more fervently than ever that it might be hers.

But Mr. Catt was not really heartless. A few days later on his way home from a short trip to his claims, he found a half-starved cat tied to a lonely yucca far up on the mountain trail, where it had been abandoned by its inhuman owners and left to this terrible fate. Indignation burned within the man as he realized the plight of the unhappy animal, and remembering Tabitha's plea for a pet, he carried the scrawny feline home to the child, feeling assured of its welcome there. But unfortunately the cat was as black as a coal, without a white hair on its body; its tail had a very perceptible crook in it which refused to be straightened out; its ears had been closely cropped, and altogether it was so gaunt and

hideous that involuntarily one shuddered to look at it.

"A cat!" exclaimed disappointed Tabitha when she had been called to see the gift. "I never asked for a cat; I don't want a cat; I hate cats! There are enough cats in this house already without this horrible skeleton. I suppose you will want me to call it Tabby. Oh, dear, what a time I do have living!"

With a wail of woe Tabitha fled up the trail to her hidden chamber among the boulders and threw herself on the ground to sob out her grief and anger over this unexpected and wholly unwelcome pet. That she would regard the gift as an insult when he had presented it with the best of intentions had never occurred to the father, and not understanding her antipathy for all of the feline tribe, he was naturally somewhat angry at her attitude; so he insisted that the cat had come to stay. And indeed it looked as if she had, for no one wanted the homely, starved creature, and though three times Tabitha surreptitiously pushed her down the shaft of an abandoned mine on the other side of the mountain, the animal always appeared serenely at meal time with a more ravenous appetite than ever, and Tabi-

tha began to think that the "nine lives of a cat" was no joke, but a dreadful reality.

"I wish the owners of that thing had kept her. It was cruel to tie her to the yucca and leave her to starve to death, but I 'most wish she'd been dead when Dad found her. I hate the sight of her." She was sitting on the lower step, elbows on her knees and chin resting in her hands as she somberly surveyed the greedy animal lapping up the milk she had just set before it, and vainly wished she had no pet at all.

The kitchen door opened behind her and the father stepped out on the porch. His quick glance took in the whole situation in an instant, and recalling the conversation concerning the dog a few nights previously, he asked with some curiosity, "What have you named your cat, Tabitha?"

Without lifting her eyes or manifesting any interest in the subject she answered briefly, "Lynne Maximilian."

The man started as if he could not believe his ears, and then with an almost audible chuckle of amusement, he descended the steps and strode rapidly up the path toward the town.

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW BOY

There was a new boy at school.

In this little town with its ever changing population of miners and fortune seekers, the advent of a stranger as a usual thing caused little if any excitement. But with this boy it was different, though the children could not have explained wherein he was unlike themselves. It could not be his clothes, for Jimmy Gates, the hotel-keeper's son, was the best-dressed boy in town; it could not be his appearance, for though he was undoubtedly good-looking, he did not begin to be as handsome as Herman Richards; it could not be the place where he lived, for the Carson house was the largest and most attractive in town. And yet there was something about him that won him a ready welcome wherever he went.

Tabitha was fairly hypnotized. She could not keep her eyes off him whenever the opportunity to look in his direction came to her,

which fortunately was not often, as she sat in the front seat of the outside row, while his desk was towards the rear of the room in the same row, and they were both in nearly all the same classes, though he was obviously some two or three years older than she. However, he was further advanced in arithmetic, and recited in a different class, so she could watch him during that lesson while he was working at the blackboard, or sitting on the recitation bench in front of the whole school. He had the loveliest red-brown curls and big, red-brown eyes with long, heavy lashes! To be sure, his face was freckled, but he was always laughing and one forgot the freckles in watching his flashing white teeth or the dimples that came and went in his round cheeks.

Tabitha did not know that he hated these dimples almost as badly as she did her name, and that his beautiful curls were a great trial to him, as such things are to all boys of that tender age; but she did know that he was different from any boy she had ever seen, and so she worshipped him from afar.

Besides, he had the *grandest* name! Why had she never heard of Jerome when she gave

Tom the name of Dionysius Ulysses Humphrey Llewelyn? Maybe it wasn't too late yet. Oh, she had forgotten—how could she ever forget! And the crimson blood mounted her cheeks as she remembered that unhappy day in the long ago when she had marched up one side of the street and down the other and told the people that her name was Tabitha Catt. Tom and the Carsons and Miss Brooks had been very kind to her after that dreadful affair, and when she had gone back to school the children never once referred to the beautiful name that had been so ruthlessly snatched away from her, but they played with her just as if nothing had happened and even spoke the hateful word, Tabitha, with such a gentleness that it lost some of its sting. Carrie adopted Tom's pet name for her, so in time others of the children had taken it up and she was more frequently Puss than Tabitha; for all of which she was deeply grateful. Still, she could not help wishing that Tom's name could have been Jerome. That did sound so splendid! But Tom in her eyes was just as nice as Jerome Vane, even if he was solemn and shy while Jerome was laughing and debonair.

The new scholar had been in school just one week when one rainy day at recess while the children were playing quietly inside the building, as the weather was too forbidding to permit the usual games in the yard, Tabitha's sharp ears caught a snatch of conversation among the boys busy drawing horrible cartoons on the blackboard, and one of the speakers was her idol, Jerome Vane.

"Who's that black-haired kid that signs her name as 'T. C.' in the arithmetic class?" the new boy asked.

"Oh, that's Tabitha Catt."

"Tabitha Catt! What a funny name!" Jerome exclaimed; and Tabitha, darting a swift glance at him from the corner of her eye, saw that he was looking at her with an amused smile on his lips.

"Ain't it, though? She don't like it a bit, and took a different one; but her father made her take it all back. She's teacher's pet, so we daren't tease her."

"Huh!" declared the other with a swagger of bravado, "'twould take more than that to make me stop teasing her if I wanted to."

"Guess you don't know Miss Brooks very well."

"I don't care a hang about Miss Brooks. I'd tease if I wanted to."

"I dare you!"

"Taken!"

Tabitha was almost too shocked to move, but at this opportune moment, Carrie came running up to her desk with the news, "Sam Giles has just brought in a bucket of water. Don't you want a drink before recess is over?"

Glad to escape further observation, Tabitha followed blue-eyed Carrie over to the corner of the room where the bucket stood, surrounded by the thirsty boys and girls, all clamoring for a turn.

"Hurry up, Jack Leavitt, it's almost time for the bell and I want a drink!"

"Give me that dipper, you Jim Gates; I want another swig!"

"Wait your turn, stingy!"

At last Tabitha stood beside the pail with the dipper in her hand, but just as she lifted the big cup brimming over, someone behind her tweaked her long braid, and she heard Jerome's laughing voice saying,

“‘Tabby Catt, Tabby Catt, where have you been?’

‘I’ve been to London to see the queen.’

‘Tabby Catt, Tabby Catt, what saw you there?’—”

“I saw a sneaking boy with a shock of red hair,” finished the enraged Tabitha whirling toward him with the dripping dipper, and before he had a chance to divine her intentions or dodge to one side, she let its contents fly straight into his face.

“Tabitha Catt!”

An ominous hush had fallen over the room while this little scene was transpiring, but the angry child had not noticed the unusual silence, nor perceived that Miss Brooks had entered in time to see the deluge.

“Tabitha Catt!” repeated the astonished teacher. “I am surprised at you. Ask Jerome’s pardon for being so rude.”

Tabitha still stood beside the water bucket, quivering in every limb, eyes blazing, nostrils flaring, and clutching the empty dipper fiercely in her hand.

“I will not!”

The teacher was shocked; no one had ever

defied her in this manner before, and the angry blood mounted to her forehead. She would have obedience at whatever cost.

"Tabitha, I insist that you beg Jerome's forgiveness."

"I was to blame some, too, Miss Brooks," interrupted the boy shamefacedly. "I'm sorry."

"I'm not," declared the little rebel, more hurt and grieved at finding her idol shattered than angry at his teasing words.

Plainly Miss Brooks was puzzled. She could not ignore such open defiance; it must be punished in some way. What should she do? A bright thought occurred to her.

"Jerome, take your seat. Tabitha, come here."

The girl walked over to the teacher's desk, still gripping the dipper in one grimy fist, and wondering what was to befall her now. This was the first time Miss Brooks had ever punished her, and in spite of her anger, sorrowful tears gathered in her eyes. She didn't mind being hurt, but to have Miss Brooks punish her seemed more than she could bear. The teacher carefully drew her chair out on the platform in front of the whole school, and sitting down in it, took Tabitha on her knee.

“Now, Tabitha, you must sit in my lap until you will tell Jerome that you are sorry. He has begged your pardon like a man, and it is worse than impolite to refuse to do the same to him; it is wicked.”

The scholars giggled. Instantly the tears were dried, the brown face grew white and tense, the whole slender body rigid with passion, and with unseeing eyes Tabitha stared straight ahead of her, refusing to speak.

Thinking the child would see fit to do as she was told after a few moments of meditation, the teacher rapped for order, took up her book and called the next class for geography. But Tabitha's anger had swallowed up every other emotion, and all that afternoon she sat on Miss Brooks' knee, taking satisfaction in making herself as heavy as possible and in stepping on the teacher's toes as often as they came within reach.

It was an uncomfortable session for the whole school; Carrie took the punishment as keenly as if she had been the culprit and grieved herself sick over her friend's unhappiness; and the teacher was almost as sorrowful. The reproachful look in the black eyes haunted

her until several times she was on the point of allowing the girl to take her seat, but each time came the thought, "If I let this offense go unpunished, I will soon have the whole school defying me. No, she must obey, even if it is little Tabitha, and Jerome to blame." So she held the furious rebel until the clock pointed to the hour of closing, and then with the cold words, "You may go, now," she dismissed her, half expecting the girl would linger and penitently ask her forgiveness; when she meant to be very firm and make her see the error of her ways, but at last to accept her apology and let the matter drop. To her hurt surprise, however, Tabitha bundled into her wraps and bounced out of the building without waiting even for Carrie, the loyal; and with heavy heart the woman turned back to the little duties which must be attended to before she could go to her home.

The rain had ceased, but little puddles stood in every hollow, and as the schoolhouse was at the foot of the hill, it was almost surrounded by a chain of these miniature lakes. As Tabitha rushed out of the door in her mad flight, she found herself confronted by a huge pud-

dle which she could not cross without wetting her feet, and ever mindful of Aunt Maria's heroic treatments for colds, she paused to choose a better path. This gave Carrie a chance to overtake her, but before the little peacemaker could say a word of comfort to the wounded heart, Jerome's laughing tones rose clearly above the rest of the clamoring voices,

"Oh, Tabitha, wait a minute."

She hesitated, half turned as if to heed his entreaty, and then—then it happened.

"Susie's reader has a new poem in it; one that I never saw before, Tabitha," the teasing voice continued. "It says:

'My little black Tabby is perched on my
knee;

As fierce as a lion or tiger is she;

She wakes—'"

Tabitha's books fell unheeded to the ground, she leaped toward her tormentor with fury in her heart, and dealt him a staggering blow full on the nose, screaming in rage,

"I would rather be a Tabby Catt than a cross-eyed, red-headed chimpanzee."

Pushing him violently from her, she turned and fled through the wide puddle and up the

slope toward home, never hearing the loud splash behind her and the mingled screams and laughter, and not aware that the debonair Jerome with the blood spurting from his nose had lost his balance and toppled into the muddy water.

Indignant Carrie faced him as he rose to his feet, and stamping her foot in her extreme vexation, she boldly cried,

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Jerome Vane. Teacher said we mustn't tease her, and I'm glad you're hurt. You deserve to be." And she sped tearfully away in pursuit of her fleeing mate before the discomfited boy could find breath to tell her that he was ashamed of himself—thoroughly ashamed.

Miss Brooks had witnessed the fray from the window, but she wasn't the only grown-up spectator. A tall, dark man loaded down with a huge watermelon had come up the road just in time to hear and see the whole performance, and a smile of satisfaction lit his face when the girl came off victorious.

"Poor kid," he said under his breath. "She is a regular Catt all right. How will she come out of it?"

He found himself hoping that life might have much more sweetness in it for her than it had had for him. And he had named her Tabitha!

With wild rebellion in her heart and a keen sense of the injustice done her, Tabitha had rushed heedlessly up the hill and down through the pathless tangle of wet greasewood and sagebrush, splashing through mud and water with reckless abandon, and arriving home in a deplorably bespattered state, with feet wet and dress dripping. Aunt Maria saw her coming and met her at the door with an exclamation of horror: "Tabitha Catt! What do you think you are about? The very idea of running through puddles in that manner! Get off those wet shoes this minute and put your feet in the oven. If I just had some mullein leaves now to make compresses with! Look at your dress, and this is the second this week. Lucky this is Friday or you would have to wear a dirty gown to school tomorrow."

The door opened again and Mr. Catt came in just in time to hear the last words of the scolding. Laying the watermelon on the table, he turned to the child huddled in the corner

close to the hot stove, and demanded, "How did you get so muddy?"

"Coming home from school."

"Say 'sir' when you address me. What were you doing to get so wet?"

"Running."

"*What?*"

"Running, sir."

"What were you running for?" He was trying to make her confess what had happened at the schoolhouse, but she had her own method of answering questions, and that was seldom very satisfactory to the questioner so far as the amount of information was concerned.

"For exercise," she snapped, forgetting her fear of him in her exasperation at these other unhappy events.

"You were fighting," he said sternly, and she started in surprise, but made no answer.

"Weren't you?"

"No."

"*What?*"

"No, sir."

"Tabitha Catt!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Go to your room. No melon to-night for a girl who will tell such a deliberate lie."

Tabitha rose instantly, seized her draggled belongings and started for her door, but paused on the threshold to say, "I hit him only once. That ain't fighting, is it? I wanted to trounce him good; he deserved it."

Her door shut with an emphatic bang, and the weary, perplexed, belligerent little girl crept into bed to sob herself to sleep.

Breakfast was over, the dishes all cleared away and the kitchen deserted when she awoke the next morning; but on the table stood a tray on which her lunch was set forth, and beside it lay a note from Aunt Maria saying that a sick neighbor had sent for her and she would be gone for some time.

Tabitha took a survey of the premises. Tom was at the office, the father nowhere in sight. Where was the watermelon? Surely three people couldn't have eaten all of it in one meal! Oh, there it was in the cooler and not even cut. She stood contemplating it for a moment, then with a deft motion rolled it out on the floor. It was so heavy she could scarcely lift it. She looked around for something to assist her, and her eye fell upon an empty flour-sack which Aunt Maria had left on top of the barrel, evi-

dently intending to wash it out. Seizing this, she spread it open beside the melon, rolled the great green ball inside, and dragged the trophy out of doors up the rocky path to the road and out of sight among the boulders. There she stood and surveyed the bag while she wrestled with herself.

"He said I lied, and I didn't. It wasn't a fight, for Jerome never hit me at all. It takes two to make a fight. Miss Brooks says so. He's always telling me I lie. He never said I couldn't have some melon today. Maybe if I had left it alone he would have given me some. Perhaps I'd better take it back."

She stooped over, grabbed the end of the bag and started back down the trail again, but at the first step she stopped. It was the wrong end of the sack she had clutched, and the melon had rolled out into the sand.

"Oh, gracious! However did that happen?" she exclaimed aloud in horror, gazing with fascinated eyes at the battered, hopelessly scarred ball which had once been so smooth and round and green. Scarcely a bit of the skin remained on its sides, and a great, jagged crack almost split the thing in halves.

“Now, I’ve done it! What will Dad say? Guess I’ll get a licking this time sure. Well, he needn’t have said I lied. Serves him right that his old melon is spoiled. It’s a pity to waste it, though. Guess I better eat it. If I am going to get licked, I may as well have the melon first; maybe it won’t hurt so bad. It looks perfectly beautiful inside.”

Down beside the shattered fruit she sat and began munching the red, sweet, juicy pulp which smelled oh, so good! But somehow the taste was bitter in her mouth, and the tempting morsels choked her when she tried to swallow them. She reviewed the previous day’s happenings and began to wonder if she were entirely blameless. She had promised Mr. Carson not to get mad when folks teased her, and here she had not only got mad but had hurt Jerome, defied the teacher and stepped on her toes, wounded faithful Carrie by running away from her, angered her father and stolen his melon.

There was the sound of horse’s hoofs and the rumbling of wheels on the hard roadbed, and around the rocky hillside appeared a light carriage driven by a portly, middle-aged man

of professional appearance, who drew rein at sight of the child sitting there so disconsolately with the broken watermelon between her knees.

"Hello, sis," he said pleasantly, "can—"

"If you will follow the road you will reach Silver Bow in just a few seconds. It's right around that next curve," recited Tabitha rapidly, as if well accustomed to directing travelers.

The man smiled in amusement, and Tabitha wondered vaguely where she had seen him before, for he certainly looked familiar. "I happen to be staying at Silver Bow just at present, so I know where to go," he answered genially, removing his hat to fan himself, and exposing to view a head of wavy red-brown hair streaked liberally with gray. "I was going to ask you if you could tell me what you were doing up there and where you got that watermelon."

"Yes?"

He waited expectantly, but no further explanation was forthcoming, and he gently reminded her, "I am listening."

"Well, I don't intend to tell you," she burst

forth hotly, "for it is none of your business!"

Instantly the kindly face became grave and he bowed politely as he gathered up the reins, saying, "Oh, I beg your pardon, little girl; it was rude of me to ask such a question. I forgot my manners."

She felt his unspoken reproof keenly and her face flushed with shame, but before he could drive on she cried impetuously, "It wasn't your manners that were forgot, it was mine. I have to be so polite to Dad and Miss Brooks that I don't have any manners left, I reckon. I am sorry I was rude. I stole this melon and drug it up here to plague Dad 'cause he said I couldn't have any, but it got smashed all into bits coming up, so I thought I better eat it so's to save it. Aunt Maria doesn't like anything to go to waste. But the melon is sour, I reckon, and I'm sorry I took it. I'd have lugged it back again but it was a sight to be seen and wouldn't have held together till I could have got it there. Now I s'pose I'd better go home and get ready to be licked. It will surely come this time."

As this torrent of words tumbled from her lips she rose from her seat and slid down the

rocky incline to the road where the stranger sat staring at her in absolute amazement.

"Are you Tabitha Catt?" he asked at last.

"Yes, sir. How did you know me?" and a look of intense bitterness crept into her eyes as the hateful name sounded in her ears.

"My boy is in school here, and he told me—"

"Is your boy Jerome Vane?" she interrupted, suddenly recognizing the great similarity between man and boy.

"Yes, I am Dr. Vane—"

"Well, I must say you've got the impolitest boy I ever saw! I threw 'most a bucket of water in his face yesterday and punched his nose good. Dad saw me and that's why he said I couldn't have any watermelon."

The doctor's face was a study, his lips twitched and his eyes grew suspiciously bright. Leaning over the side of the carriage, he held out his hand to the barefooted girl among the rocks and said tenderly,

"Come home with me, Tabitha. The little mother wants to see you. Jerome is sorry and he will never torment you again. He didn't understand."

Tabitha eyed the doctor doubtfully. Maybe

he wanted to lick her for the blow she had given Jerome; but one look at the sympathetic face dispelled her fear, and she started as if to accept his invitation, then drew back.

"Thank you, Dr. Vane. I should be pleased to accompany you," she said with all the politeness and formality she could muster, "but I reckon I'd better be going home now. Dad is probably looking for me by this time. He'll want his melon."

The doctor surveyed the shattered fruit on the mountainside, and then looked down into the small brown face with its pathetically drooping mouth.

"We'll drive around by the store and get another melon, Tabitha, and everything will be all right. Won't that do?"

"Why didn't I think of that before?" she exclaimed in visible relief. "How much will it cost? Four bits?"

"Yes, maybe a little more. Such things cost more here on the desert than they do where they are raised."

Her face fell. "I've got only forty-two cents in my bank. I reckon I'll have to take the licking after all."

"I'll give you the rest—" he began.

"No, I mustn't take money from people unless I've done something to earn it. But—if you will lend me eight cents, I'll pay it back as soon as I can earn it,—that is, if you can wait for it. Maybe it will be quite a while before I get any more. There ain't many things a girl can do on the desert to earn money fast. In Ferndale I used to pick berries. Do you think you can wait?"

"Yes, indeed, Tabitha. Climb in and we'll hurry that melon home before anyone knows it is gone."

Up into the carriage she scrambled and away they drove towards town.

CHAPTER VIII

TABITHA BEGS PARDON

With the melon resting securely in the cooler at home, Tabitha felt better, but the weight of her sins was not wholly lifted yet, and she dreaded to meet the doctor's wife after the encounter she had had with Jerome the previous day; so the ride through town to the little brown cottage high on the mountainside overlooking the "flat" was very silent, and when the doctor lifted her from the carriage at his door, her eyes wore their frightened look, so pathetic in one so young. He noted the unchildlike expression on the thin face and felt her trembling in his arms, but before he could think of anything cheerful to say, Jerome bounded out of the house and met her half way up the steps with the impulsive words,

"I was very rude to you yesterday, Tabitha, and I am truly sorry. I was *all* to blame and I should have told Miss Brooks so. Won't you be friends with me now?"

Sincerity rang in his voice and his face was full of contrition. Tabitha's resentment was wholly conquered and her last fear vanished. She gravely extended her hand to meet his and the hatchet was buried in that handclasp.

"Come now and see Mamma. She's lying down because she has been awfully sick. That's what we came here for, and she is anxious to see you."

The next instant Tabitha stood in the presence of a tiny, white-faced woman with the most wonderful eyes she had ever seen. They shone like stars but held the warmth of the sun in their glance, and instinctively the child recognized in this frail invalid a friend. Without waiting for the formality of an introduction, without stopping to think of consequences, Tabitha flew to the couch and dropped down beside it, crying remorsefully,

"I hit him an awful whack right on the nose, and I *meant* to. I just itched to thrash him good. If I'd been a boy I reckon I would have pitched into him. I nearly drowned him in the water-bucket and wouldn't say I was sorry. I wasn't then, but I am now. Will—will—will you be friends with me after all that?"

"Poor little girl, poor little girl," said the weak voice, as the thin arms clasped her gently around. "Of course I'll be your friend. I am sorry Jerome teased you. I am afraid he likes to plague folks whenever he can, but he doesn't mean to be bad. You mustn't pay any attention to what he says and he will soon get tired of tormenting."

"That's just what Mr. Carson said, and I promised I would try not to get mad, but I forgot. I've got a perfectly terrible temper, and when it boils up inside of me it just sizzles all over everything before I can stop it. Why, I even sassed Dad! I thought sure he'd lick me, but he didn't."

"Tell me all about it," urged the tender-hearted woman, and Tabitha poured out her pent-up griefs and longings into those sympathetic ears with a passion that astonished her listeners.

"I don't know what I'd do without Tom. He's my 'Guardian Angel.' Did you ever read the book called *The Guardian Angel*? The surveyor let me take it. It's about a girl who had almost as ugly a temper as mine. She didn't have any mother or father. I've got Dad, but

he hates us. I reckon it must be a job to move us everywhere he wants to go, and it is particularly bad now, 'cause Aunt Maria doesn't like it and she keeps saying she won't stay. Tom's most grown up now though, and when he gets through college and has a surveying office of his own, I'm going to keep house for him. In two more years now he'll be ready to go to Reno to college. Mr. Carson and the surveyor are helping him with his lessons, so he doesn't have very much time to teach me any more; but I am way ahead of Carrie and Nettie and the other girls of my age and I'm going to learn all I can so's I can help Tom. If I only had a pretty name, I think I could stand Dad, but it's awfully trying to have two such things to bother you all the time. There, now, I didn't mean to say that! Miss Brooks says it is wicked to talk so, and I made up my mind to forever quit saying mean things. I guess I am pretty bad, for I do forget so awfully often—so very often. 'Awfully' isn't a nice word to use, Miss Brooks says. Do you know, her first name is Stella and it means 'star.' Isn't that a pretty name? My first name is Tabitha and it means cat; so I am a

double cat, for you see my last name is Catt, too."

"But, my dear," interrupted the woman gently, "nobody is going to care what your name is if you are sweet and happy and sunny. They will like you without ever thinking what the name means."

"Now isn't it funny that two people should think the same way? Mr. Carson told me all that, but I was afraid he didn't know for certain, because he isn't a Catt. But then, you aren't a Catt, either."

"Other people can have bad tempers, dear. I used to get just terribly angry when I was a little girl—"

"You don't look like it now. How did you get over it?" The black eyes glistened with eagerness and the little face was full of wistfulness.

"My mother used to talk to me and—"

"I might be better if I had a mother. Aunt Maria doesn't know how to mother anything."

"I didn't have my mother always, dear, but long after she was gone, I remembered the things she used to tell me, and they helped me so much to control my temper."

"What did she say?" she asked curiously.

"Many, many things, Tabitha; too many to think of now. But she gave me a rule to help me from getting mad, which I have never forgotten. She told me to count ten when I was angry before I spoke a word to anyone; and by the time I had counted ten I had hold of my temper, so it couldn't get away. Sometimes, of course, I made mistakes and said things I regretted afterwards, and then my mother taught me to go to the people I had hurt and ask their forgiveness. It was often very hard to do, but I felt so much happier afterward, and I have never been sorry for begging a person's pardon."

"Even if they weren't nice to you?"

"Yes, dear, even if they were horrid. I knew I had done my part and could forget all about the trouble; but if I hadn't told them I was sorry, then I was unhappy all the time."

Tabitha looked thoughtfully out of the window far across the desert to the mountains beyond, and finally answered slowly, "Well, that's worth trying, though being a Catt seems to make everything different for me. Maybe—" The noon whistle blew, and the

child leaped to her feet with a startled exclamation. "I must be going now. Aunt Maria wasn't at home when we took the melon down, and no one knows where I've gone. Good-by!"

Away she rushed down the mountain path and up the main street of the town toward home. As she neared the schoolhouse, she saw through the open window the teacher correcting papers at her desk, her head bowed low over her work and one hand shading her eyes.

"I was real wicked to her," said Tabitha to herself. "I ought to tell her how sorry I am—for I am sorry now."

Impulsively she ran across the yard, threw open the door and burst into the room.

"Teacher—Miss Brooks, I was real ugly and wicked yesterday. He did make me awfully mad when he said such horrid things about my name, but I oughtn't to have thrown water in his face nor dumped him in that puddle. He said I did—but I never saw that part of it. He says he's sorry and I'll believe him now. Will—will you be friends with me again? I forgot my manners when I sassed you. I didn't mean to. It was real hateful of me to tromp on your toes and bear down hard

on your knee, and I'm ever so sorry. Can you—forgive me?"

Oh, but it was hard to say that, and the culprit stood shifting from one foot to the other in embarrassment and shame with eyes downcast and cheeks aflame. There was a quick step on the rough floor, a strong arm encircled her gently, and for a brief moment she was held in a close embrace while Miss Brooks whispered tenderly in her ear. Then they had a long talk—Tabitha had forgotten all about the dinner hour—and when they parted it was with a better understanding of each other.

"She kissed me," breathed the child in ecstasy as she hurried up the hill. "That's the first time a lady ever kissed me, except Mrs. Carson. It is so nice to have friends! And Mrs. Vane is right, it does feel good when you've told folks you are sorry. I wonder—there's Dad—I sassed him and stole his watermelon. But he's hated me ever since I was born. I wonder if it would be worth while to tell him I'm sorry. I wonder if I would be lying if I said that to him. I wish he was like Carrie's father or Dr. Vane; I could tell them I was sorry and really feel sorry. Perhaps if

I told him I knew how wicked I was, the sorri-ness would come later. I'll try it this time, and if it doesn't work—well, I needn't do it again."

With fluttering heart and breathing quickly, she boldly entered the small kitchen where the rest of the family were just rising from dinner. The father scowled disapprovingly at her tardiness, but before he could utter a word of reproof, Tabitha marched up to him and rapidly began,

"I was real mad at your saying I had been fighting when I hadn't hit Jerome but once and he had never hit me at all, and I was madder still when you said I couldn't have any watermelon; so I stole the whole thing out of the cooler and hid it up among the rocks, but it got smashed when I dragged it over the stones, so it wasn't fit to bring back when I began to think it was a licking this time sure.

"The doctor came along just then and told me maybe if I bought another melon it would be all right, so I did, borrowing eight cents of him, for which I must work until I get it paid back. I think this melon is better than the one you got anyhow, but if you still think it's got to be a licking, why, I'm ready."

She paused for breath, while he, speechless with astonishment at this lengthy confession, stared at her with uncomprehending eyes. Was this Tabitha? What could have happened to bring about this state of affairs?

"Teacher and Mrs. Vane say it is wicked to get mad and we always ought to beg folks'—" she could not say 'forgiveness' to him—"folks' pardon when we say or do things we ought not to. I ought not to have toted that melon off. What are you going to do about it?"

She was trembling from head to foot with excitement and nervous dread, and it seemed to her that he had never looked so formidable before; but though her heart quaked, she courageously stood her ground, and waited for him to name her sentence.

"You better eat your dinner and help your aunt clear away the dishes and do up the other work instead of gadding all over the neighborhood," he said gruffly to hide his feelings, and taking his hat, he passed out of the door, leaving a surprised but much relieved little girl to enjoy a huge slice of watermelon which she found on her plate.

CHAPTER IX

A BRAVE LITTLE CATT

Miss Brooks was going away. This was her last week of school and next September when the children gathered again in the familiar old building, there would be a new teacher in her stead. The children were disconsolate, for in the three years that she had instructed them in the mysterious ways of knowledge, they had come to love her very dearly and to consider her one of their possessions. So it was a great shock to learn of her intentions, and particularly was this true with Tabitha whose grief at the impending loss was too deep for words. She could only stare and stare at the beloved face as the days slipped by lessening the teacher's stay with them, until Miss Brooks was so haunted by those pathetically appealing black eyes that she could scarcely sleep and began to wonder why it was that she should feel so much like a criminal every time she looked at the child.

At last a happy thought occurred to her. She interviewed Mr. Carson, Dr. Vane and other prominent men of the town, with the result that the last Monday of the term she faced the scholars with a happy smile on her lips and hope in her heart, as she announced, "Children, I have some good news to tell you—"

"You're not going away after all!" breathed Tabitha ecstatically, but the next instant her face fell, for the teacher gently shook her head to signify that this guess was wrong.

"No, it isn't that, for I really cannot come back here next fall, children, or I would. But as long as I am going away, I thought we would celebrate it by having a farewell picnic. In the city where I live if any of our friends go away to live somewhere else, we always give them a little party as a sort of good-by to them, and we have a jolly time which they can remember always. Instead of having a party here, I thought it would be nice if we could go down to the river for a picnic, so I asked some of the gentlemen here in town about it and they told me that we can get wagons enough to take us all down there a week from tomorrow. It is such a long, long way we couldn't walk.

It is a pretty place, too, and many of you haven't been there before. We will take our lunch and stay all day, coming home before it gets dark. Some of the parents are willing to accompany us, and we will have a fine time. How many of you would like to go?"

Up went every hand in the room and the faces of the children beamed in happy anticipation, for picnics were almost unknown here on the barren desert, and any novelty was gladly welcomed. So the scholars began happy plans for this unusual gala day, and all that long week little else was thought of. This was just what Miss Brooks had hoped for, because in their looking forward to this extraordinary pleasure in their humdrum lives, they ceased to harass their teacher with mournful laments and direful prophecies, and even Tabitha's face lost some of its reproachful look.

The picnic day dawned at last, clear, cloudless and warm but not too hot, for the desert summer was not fairly upon them yet; and with lunch-baskets and buckets on their arms, and faces wreathed with expectant smiles, the thirty children gathered around the low school-house impatiently waiting for the teams.

Both of Carrie's parents, Susie's mother, Dr.

Vane and Herman's aunt were to help Miss Brooks take care of her restless charges and make the day a success; so no wonder everyone was happy in their anticipation of a good time. Then, too, some of the miners who had heard the great event talked up, got together in the dead of night and decorated the several rigs with gay bunting, fastening two small flags to the front of each wagon and even trimming up the horses' harnesses until the results were quite dazzling to childish eyes. What did it matter to them that some of the bunting had been watersoaked and that the flags were faded almost white? The effect was gay and festive and the whole town's population turned out to see the procession start up the mountain road lustily singing *My Country*, while they waved their handkerchiefs and caps in the early morning sunshine in proud acknowledgment of the cheers which greeted them on every side. Oh, it was a happy day for Tabitha, and under cover of the music she confidently whispered to Carrie that this was the first picnic she had ever been allowed to attend, which fact surprised that little miss exceedingly.

It was a long drive to the river, up hill and down, over rocky roads, through sandy soil, among the ugly Spanish bayonets and cacti resplendent with scarlet blossoms, and over the desert, now a mass of gorgeous colors, for the summer suns had not yet burned out the little life which the winter rains had coaxed into blooming. How beautiful the gold and crimson flowers looked dotted over the hills and the flat like a brilliant carpet with its sage-green background and occasional dash of deeper green where patches of "filaree" covered the sandy soil!

How glorious it was to watch the gayly plumed birds as they swung from bush to bush among the yuccas and greasewood, pouring out their very souls in their joyous morning lay, seemingly with no fear of the noisy, happy picnickers rumbling along the roadway! Cottontails and jackrabbits darted across the path and into hiding, an occasional harmless snake lifted its head to survey them and then glided away among the rocks, and twice a startled covey of quail rose from the underbrush and vanished in the blue mountain air. Oh, it was

grand! How could she ever have thought the desert lonely and barren and hideous!

Then the river came into view and she held her breath in delight, for the purple haze of the mountains beyond hung low in the valley, and lent an indescribable charm to the whole surrounding country, as if it were not a reality, but some great, grand picture hung before them which they could gaze upon but never reach, for, as they approached the enchanted spot, the beautiful mountains as slowly receded, still clad in their purple veil and still mysteriously alluring.

Under a clump of low, glistening cottonwoods among the tall, rank swale-grass and rough-leaved yellow-weed, the picnic party came to a halt and the merry children swarmed down over the wagon wheels, eager to begin their day's frolic beside the sluggish river.

"Now, if someone will just take care of the baby," suggested Susie's mother as they unloaded the lunch baskets, "I'll help the other ladies get dinner ready and you can have lunch just that much sooner."

"Oh, let me, Mrs. McKittrick," cried Tabitha, who had wished all the morning that she

had been in the rig with the McKittrick family so she might hold the little dimpled, laughing mite, who made friends with everyone and was worshipped by all the children, but remained unspoiled in spite of the attentions showered upon him by this admiring court.

"Well, all right, Tabitha. Watch him and see that he doesn't roll down the bank or put anything in his mouth. He's into everything."

"What's his name?"

"He hasn't any yet. We can't find one pretty enough for him."

"And he is 'most a year old!"

"Yes, he will be a year next month, but he is the first boy in a family of four girls, and we can't decide what to call him, so he has no name yet. You might think up some pretty ones to suggest. We've exhausted everyone else's lists."

She laughed as she spoke, but Tabitha thought she was thoroughly in earnest, and seizing the baby, she ran away to ponder over the vital question of pretty names, confident of finding one that would suit the over-particular parents.

"I'd like to call him Dionysius if he was

mine," she confided to Carrie, who soon joined her in her self-appointed task of nursemaid, for the two girls were seldom apart; "but—after—that time—well, he might not like it when he grew up. I am afraid it might be unlucky."

"Frederick is a pretty name," ventured Carrie. "That's papa's."

"Yes, that's not bad, but I reckon Mrs. McKittrick has heard of it already, for I know lots of people called that. She wants something real pretty. I know how it is, for my name is so perfectly horrid that sometimes it seems as if I can't endure it. I wouldn't want to pick out a name that this darling baby would hate when he grew up. It must be something *awfully* nice. How do you think she would like Rosslyn? I have liked that name ever since I heard it and was always sorry I could not stay in Ferndale and get acquainted with the boy it belonged to, and his cousin Rosalie."

"If you had stayed there I never would have known you, Pussy," suggested Carrie, for Tabitha was her idol and she shuddered when she thought how lonely it would be if Tabitha should move away now and leave her there.

"That's so; I forgot it just for a minute. I'm sure Rosalie could never have been any nicer than you are, and I don't believe Rosslyn was nicer than Jerome, though Jerome does tease me dreadfully sometimes. He doesn't mean to, and he always tells me he is sorry. I like the name Jerome, but Mrs. McKittrick says she hates it, so it would never do to suggest that."

"Don't they use last names sometimes for first names? Mrs. McKittrick thinks Dr. Vane is splendid. I heard her tell mamma so. He saved the baby when it was so terribly sick and the other doctor said it could not get well."

"Maybe it would do for part of the name, though I wouldn't want to call him Vane every day. That would sound as if he was a peacock. See him pull that flower to pieces just as if he was trying to study how it is put together. Maybe he will grow up to be a big botany man. I would like to be one myself if I didn't intend to keep house for Tom. Oh, the baby has started for the river!"

Both girls sprang up and gave chase and Carrie straightway forgot all about the name problem, but Tabitha's busy brain puzzled

over it all that happy day, even while she romped and played with her mates in lively games of "Farmer in the Dell," "Old Mother Witch," "Drop the Handkerchief," and all the other childhood favorites. Once she almost forgot it. They were playing "Blind Man's Buff," when Jerome, who was "it," succeeded in catching her by her hair after an animated scrimmage. Her braid promptly gave away her identity, for no other girl in school possessed such long tresses; and Jerome was elated at having so readily discovered who his prisoner was, all the more so because this was the first time Tabitha had been caught; so he teasingly cried, "Aha, this is Miss Me-a-ow!"

How the children shouted, and for a moment Tabitha's face was crimson with passion and she lifted a doubled-up fist threateningly; but before the expected blow fell, Tabitha's lips curved suddenly into a smile, her arm dropped to her side, and she gayly answered, "Yes, Mr. Ki-yip-ki-yi-yi, put on my blinders."

Only Miss Brooks of the grown people had witnessed the child's struggle, and as they were sitting down to the generous lunch spread under the cottonwoods, she drew the flushed face

down beside her and said very softly, "That was well done, dear. I am proud of you."

"You needn't be," was the candid reply. "I was all ready to scratch for all I was worth when I saw the baby and I knew I wasn't a fit person to name such a little darling if I couldn't stand a little teasing. Jerome didn't mean anything by it and was sorry as soon as he had said it. He came to me afterwards and told me so, and then I was doubly glad I had kept still. But it was really the baby who made me. I even forgot Mrs. Vane's rule of counting ten."

"It will be easier to remember the next time," Miss Brooks told her, feeling devoutly thankful that the day had not been marred by a display of that fierce, uncontrollable temper, and in her gratitude she heaped Tabitha's plate with sandwiches and all the other good things.

"Now the baby must have his nap," said Mrs. McKittrick when the last crumb of cake had disappeared and the last drop of lemonade vanished. "I'm going to lay him under the wagons where it is coolest, and you children play down there by that other clump of trees, or else he won't sleep a wink."

"We're going to tell stories and listen to Mr. Carson's talking machine for awhile," volunteered Susie, "so we won't make much noise. Come on, ma, baby will be all right there."

The mother made the tiny boy comfortable in a shady nook and then joined the group of children gathered under the cottonwoods a little further down the river, laughing over the queer songs the machine was grinding out; and in this exciting sport all thought of the baby was swallowed up, except by Tabitha, who was still busily engaged in fitting together all the possible and impossible names she had ever heard, in the hope of finding some combination which would suit the beautiful boy and please his adoring family.

"Rosslyn Lyle—no, that won't do; it is too hard to pronounce. Rosslyn Leander—that is almost as bad. Rosslyn simply won't go with any name beginning with 'L.' Rosslyn Thomas so he will be named after Tom; but then probably Mrs. McKittrick doesn't like Thomas for a name. Few people do, though I think it is rather pretty when it belongs to someone else but a Catt. Rosslyn Brooks after teacher. Why didn't I think of that before!

Mrs. McKittrick thinks Miss Brooks is the loveliest teacher she ever knew; I'm sure she would like the Brooks part of it, and I don't see how anyone can help liking the name of Rosslyn. It isn't as grand sounding as Dionysius, but it is prettier for a baby. Two names are so short, though; and anyway Carrie thinks Mrs. McKittrick would like part of it to be Vane after the doctor. Mr. McKittrick works in the Silver Legion Mines, so I suppose he wouldn't mind if part of the name was Mr. Carson's. I don't like Frederick very well, so it would have to be Carson. Well, Rosslyn Brooks Carson Vane sounds quite pretty—very pretty—I like it ever so much. I wonder what Mrs. McKittrick will think of it."

She looked around to see what had become of the mother, and beheld a sight that froze the blood in her veins. Close beside the wagon under which the sleeping baby lay was a huge snake coiled as if ready to spring, and her heart stood still with terror as she realized that one move of those little unconscious hands might mean death for the precious darling. She tried to scream, but her voice stuck in her throat. She looked wildly about her for help,

but the children were wandering on the river bank gathering flowers and Mr. Carson was busy with the talking machine which was evidently out of order. Dr. Vane was nowhere in sight nor were any of the women within call.

She must rescue the baby herself. She had often seen Tom kill snakes since they had come to live on the desert, and once he had dispatched a large rattler not far from their cottage, though poisonous reptiles were not often found so close to town. Oh, if Tom were only there!

Then her glance fell upon a smooth rock at her feet. She was a good shot, but could she risk it with that little life hanging in the balance? There was another stone, and another. She clutched them with trembling hands, crept cautiously forward and, taking careful aim, hurled the rock at the head of the coiled serpent. She missed, the snake coiled more tightly, sounded its warning and sprung straight towards her. This was what she had hoped for; and leaping nimbly aside, before he could coil for another spring, she struck him squarely on the head, following that blow up with a perfect rain of rocks, carefully keeping

out of range lest he should coil again, and hurling each missile with all her fierce strength, losing her fear of her opponent as her anger grew.

Suddenly a shot rang sharply through the air, there was a sound of excited voices, the children came running toward her with the baby's white-faced mother in advance; and Tabitha, dropping weakly to the ground, burst into wild, hysterical sobs. With his smoking pistol still covering the shattered reptile, Dr. Vane, almost as white as the frantic mother, gathered the trembling girl in his arms and tried to soothe her fright, saying, "There, there, my little Puss; it is all over! The snake is dead and the baby isn't harmed at all. Don't cry like that! You did a very brave thing. Look up and see the old fellow."

Mr. Carson and the boys had clustered around the snake, examining it curiously, and now the man lifted his head and looked down at the doctor, still bending over the girl.

"I believe she had killed it, Vane, without your bullet. What splendid nerve! The fellow's got eight rattles. Do you want them for a souvenir, Tabitha?" But she shook her head

and clung to the doctor, quivering with nervous dread.

After a long time the children were quieted, and as the day drew to a close, they clambered back into the wagons, and set out on their homeward drive, rather subdued, but happy that everyone was safe, and proud of their mate whose prompt action had perhaps saved a life so dear to them all. Tabitha was a heroine! Poor Tabitha, such an unexpected honor was almost as hard to bear as the teasing she so bitterly resented, and she hid her head in embarrassment and confusion, refusing at first to look up or say a word, except to the baby, who cooed and crowed in delight in her arms.

"Do you know," said the mother, whose face was still white and drawn from her fright, "I am going to let you name the baby. It is a very little thing to do for a girl who has saved his life, but I'm not rich and can't pay a big reward like rich folks do."

"Oh, Mrs. McKittrick, can I really name him? I don't want any reward for trying to save him. Even if you had lots of money I wouldn't take it. He is worth more than money and the happiest thing you could do for

me is to let me name him. I've got a splendid one already picked out for him. I was just going to ask you what you thought of it when I saw the snake. It is Rosslyn Brooks Carson Vane. Isn't that splendid?"

So the McKittrick baby was named at last.

CHAPTER X

CARRIE GOES AWAY TO SCHOOL

Tabitha stood at the open window of Carrie's pretty room and looked out over the scorched landscape burning under the pitiless sun of late summer. But she did not see the scanty, shrivelled vegetation of the parched mountains, nor was she aware of the terrible heat of the day that seemed to have burned away the ambition of every living creature. On the floor beside the little white bed with its pink draperies sat Carrie, panting in the sultry atmosphere, and anxiously watching the figure beside the window, as she fanned herself with all the energy she could command.

"You aren't a bit glad, Puss," she said at last, trying to keep the disappointment out of her voice. But if Tabitha heard she gave no sign and the tears rose in the gentle blue eyes of the speaker. "I thought you would think it was nice." Still Tabitha made no reply, but kept her gaze fixed on the hot sands of the siz-

zling desert. "We have planned it out so often, and now when w—I can go, you don't like it."

Gulping back the lump that rose in her throat, the black-eyed girl by the window wheeled toward her playmate, now lying prostrate on the floor, and dropping on her knees beside her she exclaimed penitently,

"I am mean, Carrie! I am glad because *you* are going away to school, but—it is so hard to have you leave here—when I can't go, too. Ain't I selfish? It isn't as if it would be only for a week or even a month, but for whole years with only a few days here in the winter! And you're the only friend I ever had so near my own age!"

Tabitha was crying now and Carrie forgot her own disappointment in soothing the greater sorrow of her mate.

"Don't feel so bad, Puss; maybe you can go, too."

"No, I can't! There isn't any use of thinking that, Carrie Carson! It takes money to go to boarding school and Dad never has any any more. His claims take all he gets. I wish he would let the Cat Group go to Guinea and

work for the Silver Legion like Mr. McKittrick does. Mercedes McKittrick is going next year. I want to go so much. I'm almost as far as I can get in this little mite of a school and I can't bear to think of growing up a know-nothing."

"You won't be a know-nothing, Puss, even if you never went to school another day. Papa says it is ambition that wins, and you're the most ambitious girl I ever knew. I'd like to go to boarding school for the fun of it, but I do hate to study. Papa thinks maybe—"

She hesitated, remembering that she had been cautioned not to tell his plans, for fear they might not be successful, but it was hard for Carrie to keep such a beautiful secret, when she felt so confident that this kind, big-hearted father would succeed in overcoming even Mr. Catt's prejudices in regard to a boarding-school education for his one small daughter.

"Maybe what?"

"Maybe—just *maybe*—he can get your father to let you go."

Tabitha was silent for a moment and the black eyes shone wistfully; then she answered with a heavy sigh, "There isn't the *least* chance

of Dad's letting me go, Carrie. I know Dad. Didn't he tell Tom that if Tom wanted to go to college he would have to earn his own money, for he had no sympathy for 'higher education'? No, he won't let me go, I know; and besides, he hasn't the money."

"Papa will p—" began Carrie, and then stopped. She had intended to say, "pay all expenses," but before the words were spoken that might raise Tabitha's hopes again, she remembered that she must not tell this part of her father's plans, and was silent. But apparently Tabitha had not heard, for she was saying,

"Tom has worked hard and earned his money for the first year and now he is to go to Reno and live at Lincoln Hall maybe, while he studies. Perhaps he can go clear through college without stopping. He says he means to finish his course if it takes eight years to get through—but it means a heap of money for him to earn, and it will be a long time before he could help me any, and I can't draw maps for the surveyor or weigh those little gold buttons like Tom does to earn money. There aren't any berries around here to pick, and

Dad won't let me hunt centipedes and scorpions to sell for specimens, like the boys do. Jack Leavitt has earned more than ten dollars that way. Jimmy Gates kills rattlesnakes for pay, but I'm afraid to do that, and I suppose Dad would object to that, too. There is really nothing on the desert that a girl can do to earn money."

Still Carrie was hopeful and tried to impart her optimism to her heavy-hearted companion.

"I believe something will happen yet, Puss, so you can go. I don't care about boarding school at all if you can't go too. Why, Puss, what would I do with no one to help me with my lessons? Papa and mamma won't be there to tell me how the horrid examples must be worked, and I might just as well stay at home if you don't go. I will never be able to see any sense in the lessons. You always make everything so clear."

Tabitha smiled in appreciation of the compliment, but was not comforted, for to her the hopelessness of the situation was very evident, and she changed the conversation by observing, "I think you have the sweetest dresses to wear there. Six new ones! Just think of it! I

never in all my life had so many at one time, and I never had any so pretty. Two white ones, a pink, two blues and a brown—aren't they dear? And three real hats! You ought to be the happiest girl on earth, Carrie."

She bent over the bed where the new wardrobe was displayed, pretending to examine the dainty apparel, but in reality to hide the tears which would persist in gathering in her eyes at thought of separation from this playmate who had helped make life so happy for her since she had come to Silver Bow.

"Tabitha!"

How welcome that voice from across the road sounded just then when she wanted to get away and be alone for a time with her thoughts, and with a hasty hug of the rosy-cheeked girl still on the floor by the bed, she rushed out of the house to answer her aunt's call.

In the cool of the evening Tom found her sitting among the rocks high up on the mountainside, gazing with somber eyes into the golden west, for the ocean lay in that direction, and it was close to the seashore that Carrie was going away to school.

"What's the matter, Puss?" he asked gently,

reading tragedy in her mournful attitude, and secretly wondering who would champion the little sister's cause when he had gone away to college.

"Nothing much, Tom," she answered, and then amended her statement; "that is, nothing that can be helped."

He sat down on the rock beside her and waited for her confession, but she was silent, and for a long time they sat staring off across the flat to the mountains beyond, where the afterglow of the brilliant sunset still hung and radiated from each peak. Then he spoke, "Puss, in two weeks I leave for the University. Did you know it?"

She nodded her head.

"Mr. Carson has just come home from Reno and he brought me all sorts of booklets and views of the place and particularly of the college buildings. Do you want to see them?"

"Yes!" She was all eagerness, for Tom's joys were hers, and his achievements the pride of her heart. So he laid a bundle of papers and pictures in her lap and drew nearer that he might make explanations and answer the questions she was sure to ask.

"There is a High School there, too, Puss, and if I have success in earning more than enough money to put me through college, I will send for you and you will keep house for me and go to High School there. Then when you graduate from that department, you will be ready to go to college, and I will be earning a salary, or maybe have an office all my own, so I can help you through the University."

"That would be nice, Tom, ever so nice, but I am afraid you will never earn the money. It will take a heap. Carrie is going away to boarding school now, and I want to go with her, but Dad won't let me."

"So you know?" The relief in Tom's voice made Tabitha look up.

"Know what?"

"Have you seen Dad yet?"

"No, but then I know he never would let me go and there is no use in asking."

"Oh!"

"Tom, has he said anything to you about it?" asked Tabitha, for she could read this brother's face like a book, and understood now that there was more behind his words than he had told her.

"No, Puss, not a word," he declared.

But she wasn't deceived, and after a moment of silence said, "Then Mr. Carson has."

"No, Mr. Carson hasn't mentioned it—to me."

The pause was hardly perceptible, but Tabitha's quick ears discerned it, and she triumphantly confronted Tom with the declaration, "You heard him ask Dad!"

"What a mind-reader you are!" he laughed.

"Now, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And Dad said I couldn't go?"

"Yes."

"I told Carrie that was what would happen." Her voice was very quiet, her face very calm, and the fierce outbreak he had expected did not come. He was amazed but he understood the struggle going on within that tempestuous heart, and was touched by her silent despair.

"Puss," he ventured after another long pause, "would you rather have me stay here with you instead of going to Reno?"

He held his breath for her answer and his heart beat wildly. How could he renounce his

ambitions or even postpone their fulfilment when they meant so much to him? But his mother had left the little sister in his care, and he was all she had to love and help her over the rough path her feet had been treading all her short life. What would she do without him, particularly if Carrie was to go away, too? Miss Brooks had already gone and the Vanes might at any time return to their city home from their long sojourn in this little desert town. Tabitha would be bereft indeed if he went to college. These thoughts flashed through his mind as he asked that vital question and waited for her reply.

“Why, Tom!” she cried in utter surprise, “do you suppose I’d want you to stay here with me when you’ve got the chance to get a ‘higher education’?” (Those words seemed to fascinate her.) “That’s better than if I could go. You’re a boy—a man, I mean—and you *have* to know lots to be a mining engineer like the surveyor. I’m just a little girl, and it doesn’t matter whether I know anything or not. You must go to the University while you have the chance, Tom. I wish I could help you earn the money so you would be sure of the whole course—”

"You precious little Puss!" he cried with a voice that would tremble in spite of his efforts to hold it steady, and slipping his arm around her he gave her a big, boyish hug. "Some day everything will come out all right and I am sure it won't be too late for boarding school and college either."

Unaccustomed to such demonstration even from the gentle-hearted boy who loved her so dearly, Tabitha sat looking shyly up at the tender brown eyes above her, thinking how nice it felt to have his protecting arm holding her close, when without warning, he stooped and kissed her full on the lips.

"Oh, Tom, you are the dearest brother! I am so glad you are going to college. Then you will grow up to be like Mr. Carson instead of like a—Catt."

"Dad went to college."

Tabitha was startled. "Why, Tom!"

"Yes, he did; but he was expelled for something another boy did, and then after he started to earn his own living, his partner cheated him out of his share in a valuable mine and—that's what makes him what he is now."

"How do you know this?"

"Oh, I've remembered things I heard him or Aunt Maria say, and then today he told Mr. Carson some of the events of his life. He *has* been rather unfortunate right straight along. Only last New Year's someone 'jumped' one of his claims that he had somehow neglected to prove up on."

"I don't see why that should make him so—so—I'm glad you are different, Tom. Do you suppose he will keep on until he is like the hermit of the hills?"

"Who is the hermit of the hills? I never heard of him before."

"Why, yes, you have! He lives in that little shack over there;" pointing to a rough, dilapidated hut far down on the mountain side, built of odds and ends of lumber and pieced out with empty oil cans, rusted red with the rains of many winters. Made without windows or openings of any sort, except a narrow door on one side, it must have presented a very dreary, uninviting appearance to its one occupant, who was the only person who had ever seen its interior, for owing to his peculiar habits, people regarded him as crazy and left him severely alone. He had never been known to molest

anyone, but sought rather to avoid meeting human beings, so he was suffered to remain there in his lonely hut on the mountain with no one but a stray cur for company.

"Oh, Surly Sim! I never heard him called such a fancy name before, Puss. How did you suppose I would recognize him?"

"‘The hermit of the hills’ is a much grander sounding name than ‘Surly Sim,’ and he does look so lonely off there by himself. I should hate to think of Dad shutting himself up like that and having folks say he was crazy. He is kind to animals."

"How do you know, Puss?" asked the boy, quickly, surveying his sister with apprehensive eyes. "You don't go over there, do you?"

"No, indeed. I'm scared of him. Besides, he runs if he sees anyone coming. Carrie and I were picking flowers the first time I ever knew he lived there, or that there was even a house over there. He saw us just as he climbed out of a hole—a prospect hole, I suppose—and he ran as tight as he could for the house and shut the door. We were scared and we ran the other way and never stopped until we got home. Mr. Carson told us about him then and

said he had never hurt anyone, but he would rather we didn't go over there, for he thought the man was really crazy. Since then I have often sat up here and watched him when it wasn't too hot. He just thinks lots of the little dog he has, and it is awfully homely; hasn't any tail or ears and is the worst-looking color I ever saw."

Tom laughed at her earnestness. "Poor dog!"

"Well, you needn't laugh; it *is* homely, and so is the cat. He has my cat. I couldn't bear to keep it, Tom. Please don't look at me like that. I was awfully hateful to it, I know, but Dad would call it 'Pussy' and I couldn't bear the sight of it. When I made sure the man was kind to the dog, I chased the cat down there. I was afraid it would come back, like it always did when I shoved it into the prospect holes; but it must have liked him right away, for it stayed. Now he has an earless cat to go with the dog. That was long ago, Tom, before the Vanes ever came here to live. I wouldn't be so mean again, but I did hate that cat terribly then. I've never tried to coax it back because it was happier there, but I am

truly sorry that I was ugly to it. I don't want people to hate me because I have such a horrid temper and name. I can't change the name, but I can hold on to my temper sometimes, though it is hard work and I don't get along very well."

"You are getting along a great deal better than you think, Puss, and people don't hate you. They like you more every day, which is better than going to boarding school, isn't it?"

"Y-e-s," hesitatingly, "but I would like mighty well to go with Carrie."

"Well, I think some day maybe you can. Come home now, it is getting dark and pretty soon we won't be able to see our way down through the mesquite."

CHAPTER XI

A FIRE IN THE NIGHT

"Aunt Maria, will you let me make some molasses taffy? Monday is Carrie's birthday and I haven't anything else to send her. She always gives me something on my birthday. I will be real careful and clean up everything when I am through."

"Well, I suppose you can try it, though I hate to have you messing around while I am getting your father's things ready for his trip."

"I won't mess, truly, Aunt Maria," and thankful at receiving even this grudging permission, she flew out into the tiny kitchen to the pleasant task of candy-making, reciting, as she rattled among the pots and pans:

"Lars Porsena of Clusium,

By the Nine Gods he swore

That the great house of Tarquin

Should suffer wrong no more.

One cup of molasses, one cup of sugar—that molasses looks awfully black; I wonder if the

taffy will be dark. I like the light-colored best.

‘Hew down the bridge, Sir Consul,
With all the speed ye may;
I, with two more to help me,
Will hold the foe in play.’

A lump of butter and a tablespoon of vinegar.
How pretty the stuff looks boiling up higher
and higher every minute. Hm, but it’s hot
work bending over this stove.

Four hundred trumpets sounded
A peal of warlike glee,
As that great host, with measured tread,
And spears advanced, and ensigns spread,
Rolled slowly toward the bridge’s head,
Where stood the dauntless Three.

My! I would like to have been there and
watched them. Isn’t Horatius a splendid
name! And Herminius—isn’t it grand! But
they are like Dionysius, no one ever uses them
nowadays. I believe that candy is almost
done. It is brittle when I put it into water.

Round turned he, as not deigning
Those craven ranks to see;
Naught spake he to Lars Porsena,
To Sextus naught spake he.”

She seized the kettle of boiling syrup and lifted it off the stove, still speaking the impassioned lines of that stirring poem, and gesticulating wildly, heedless of the utensils in her hands.

“So he spake, and speaking sheathed
The good sword by his side,
And with his harness on his back,
Plunged headlong in the tide.”

Bang! went the kettle against a chair-back, and the seething, bubbling mess of sticky brown syrup poured in a flood over furniture, girl and floor, and trickled in a rivulet around the brim of her father's hat carelessly laid on the table while he wrestled with a refractory buckle on his grip, packed ready for his departure. A gasp of dismay escaped her lips, and Tabitha stood aghast in the midst of the ruin.

“Tabitha Catt!” exclaimed the aunt, appearing that moment in the doorway.

“Tabitha Catt!” echoed the father, looking up at the sound of the crash. “I never saw such carelessness in my life. Look at that hat! My best, too!”

“You needn't have left it on the table; that's no place for your wardrobe,” burst out the in-

dignant Tabitha, sucking one blistered finger, and frantically shaking her foot where the hot drops of syrup had clung and burned.

Her unfortunate words were like oil to a flame.

"I'll have none of your impertinence, young lady," cried the irate father, seizing her by the shoulder none too gently and giving her a shake. "You deserve to be trounced."

Tabitha's heart stood still. The day of the licking had come at last! He looked around for a stick, but the woodbox contained nothing but heavy billets, and her sentence might have been suspended had his eyes not rested upon his house slippers still lying in the middle of the floor where he had thrown them upon discovering that fussy Aunt Maria had packed them among his belongings for his journey to the east. Grabbing one of these, he struck the trembling girl half a dozen light blows across the shoulders, and then dropped it, ashamed of himself and startled at the frightened, pleading look in the black eyes raised to his in mute appeal. As the first blow descended, the terror in the thin face gave way to anger, intense, unreasoning; but she stood like a statue, silent

and dry-eyed, until the slipper fell from her father's hands and he pushed her from him, saying sternly,

"What have you to say for yourself?"

She wheeled and looked at him with scornful eyes; then without a word of reply, gathered up both slippers from the floor, walked deliberately to the stove and threw them into the bed of live coals before either father or aunt could prevent.

"There, Lynne Maximilian Catt!" she exclaimed in a voice tense with passion, "you will never use that pair to larrup me with again."

He looked at her in silent amazement, and the rage died in his heart. She was the image of him. How could he blame her for displaying the passions that he himself had not learned to control? He turned back to his satchel on the floor and she, surprised that no further punishment followed her open rebellion, rushed away to her room, dribbling taffy as she ran.

"Oh, dear, Mrs. Vane's rule doesn't work at all," she moaned, nursing her blistered fingers and smarting foot, heedless of the molasses trickling down the front of her dress. "I never remember to count ten, and I suppose if

I did get that far, I would let the hateful words fly after them. It is just like me. That is what comes of being a Catt! If I only had a different name maybe it would be easier; but with a whole cat name, how is anyone going to keep from scratching?"

The hot tears came, and for a long time she lay sobbing into the fat pillow which had seen so many floods of this kind that it had grown very much accustomed to it.

She heard the door open and shut and her father's footsteps died away in the distance. He had gone without another word to her; but then this was nothing unusual. He never said good-by to anyone when he left home—that is, he had never done so but once. When he had started on his last trip, he had waved his hand to her, and called, "Good-by, Tabitha. Be a good girl." She had been startled at the unexpected words, and little thrills of joy had crept through her heart every time she thought of them. They were one of the hoarded treasures in her memory book, and she had hoped he would always remember to wave a farewell when he went away again. Now she had made him angry. Well, he had made her angry,

too. She didn't intend to spill the candy; he ought to know that; but he had struck her. She was twelve years old now and this was the first licking. She had dreaded it all her life; and was just beginning to think she had grown beyond the age of whippings when the dreadful punishment had befallen her. No, it didn't hurt much, the blows were not heavy enough for that, but the ignominy of it!

Why couldn't her father be like Carrie's? When he had waved his hand at her, she had thought maybe in time he might become like Mr. Carson, and now he had punished her with the licking that had threatened her ever since she could remember. She hated him!

"But I was impudent," she told herself as her fierce anger abated somewhat. "I needn't have said anything about his hat. Maybe then he wouldn't have struck me at all. Perhaps if I had said I was sorry and had cleaned up his hat again, he would have waved good-by to me. Perhaps—*just* perhaps he might have kissed me as Carrie's father does. But I suppose it would be too soon to expect kisses."

"Tabitha, have you gone to bed?" It was Aunt Maria's voice nervous and shaking.

"Not yet. What's the matter?" she asked.

"I thought maybe you would just as soon sleep in Tom's room tonight. There's a band of gypsies camping a little way up the road, and I don't like the idea of us two women folks being left alone all night. I tried to get Max to stay until morning, but he said he couldn't make connections if he did. I don't suppose there is anything to be afraid of, but this is our first night without a man in the house, and I am as nervous as a witch." This was a long speech for Aunt Maria, but she had a bad attack of the fidgets, and found relief in words.

Tabitha had forgotten that her father's departure would mean she and Aunt Maria must stay alone on the desert, for Tom had gone away to college ten days before; and now at her aunt's words she felt a little tremor of fear pass over her. She had never quite outgrown the feeling of oppression these black nights on the desert gave her, for the hills shut out the lights of town, and Carson's house was the only tenanted one near them. Somewhere she had heard that a man had died in the other little cottage in their neighborhood which had stood vacant ever since their arrival at Silver

Bow, and it was even hinted that his ghost had come back to haunt it. True, she had never seen anything to warrant her believing these stories, but she stood in awful dread of that house beyond them; so she was only too glad for her aunt's suggestion that she sleep in Tom's bed.

Trying to put these things out of her mind and to think of more cheerful subjects, she gathered up her belongings, and crept into the little box-like room, hardly big enough to turn around in, saying in reassuring tones to Aunt Maria,

"Of course there is nothing to be afraid of. Those campers aren't gypsies, but a lot of prospectors, and I think they moved on after they had cooked supper. At least, I saw them going towards town, horses and all. I reckon they had to lay in some more supplies and so camped near the stores to get an early start in the morning."

"Well, I wish there was a man in the house. I never did like to stay alone at night, and this desert is the blackest place I ever got into. I don't believe I shall ever get used to it."

"You aren't alone. I'm here, and I'm past twelve. There isn't anything to hurt us, and

we haven't anything that robbers would want if they should come along. Thieves would know better than to visit a desert town, Aunt Maria."

Nevertheless, the woman's nervous terror found an echo in Tabitha's heart, and instead of undressing, she exchanged her soiled dress for a fresh one, removed her shoes, and climbed into bed with her clothes on. For a long time she lay tossing on the unfamiliar couch, listening to the night sounds without, and the hideous brays of the wandering burros; but at last she fell into an uneasy slumber, and dreamed that she had gone away to boarding school, but instead of having Carrie for a playmate, her companions were two blazing shoes who kept offering her molasses taffy out of her father's hat. She awoke with a start, trembling in every limb, and frightened at her strange surroundings. Then she remembered how she came to be there, and lay down again on her pillow; but she could not sleep.

In the distance she heard the sound of a dog's insistent barking, and was annoyed by the plaintive howls. She stopped her ears but could not shut out the sound, and in despera-

tion she sat up and looked out of the window, wishing that morning would dawn.

The night was very dark, but the starlight seemed to break the heavy blackness that hung like a pall over the landscape. Off toward the horizon, in the direction of the dog's barking was a faint glimmer of wavering light, and Tabitha watched it idly for a moment, wondering if there were campers in that little hollow, too. Then the light grew brighter and more flickering, the barking more frantic, and Tabitha started up in terror.

"It's the hermit's house on fire! What can I do? Neither Tom nor Dad is here to give the alarm, and town is so far away."

She flew out of bed and to the dresser where her father's pistol was kept, lifted the ugly weapon from its case and mechanically cocked it. Tom had taught her to use a rifle, but she had never been allowed to handle a revolver, though she had watched him so often that she was familiar with its mechanism, and had no thought of fear as she sped fleetly out of the house, pausing only long enough to slip on her sticky shoes.

Bang, bang, bang! went the gun in rapid

succession; bang, bang, bang! Six times the report rang sharply through the still night air, —the signal of fire in this little desert town. Then tossing the empty pistol aside, she ran down the road as fast as her feet would carry her, all her terror of the night swept away in the one idea that the townspeople might be too late to help the old man if he should happen to be in the burning house. She never stopped to wonder what aid she, a child of twelve, could render, she never thought of arousing Mr. Carson, but stumbled breathlessly on in the darkness toward the shack now burning merrily.

Somewhere behind her she heard a second revolver alarm; then someone passed her in the road, and a man's voice called, "Go home, Tabitha. This is no place for you." But still she kept on, having scarcely heard the words, and hardly aware that other help than her own feeble strength was at hand.

That was a night she never forgot. In these desert mining towns where water costs a dollar a barrel and the system of piping it into the houses is yet in its infancy, fire is not an easy thing to fight, and many a time the whole camp has been destroyed before the conflagration

could be checked or would burn itself out. The hermit's hut, however, was so isolated that the town was in no danger, even from the flying sparks, but there was not a drop of water to throw on the flames, and the roads were too steep and rough for the volunteer fire department to drag their chemicals to the rescue.

So the little shack burned to the ground, but Mr. Carson and Tabitha arrived in time to pull the lone occupant to safety, though it was a close call for the old miner, for he was almost suffocated with the smoke and his head and hands were badly burned.

Mr. Carson, too, suffered from his buffeting with the flames, but Tabitha came out unscathed, and when the men from town arrived, hatless and anxious, they found the child helping the brave superintendent in his efforts to revive the unconscious hermit, while the little yellow cur whined in terror at their feet, and the blaze of the burning house mounted high in the heavens.

Dr. Vane was among the crowd, and he quietly took charge of the patient, easing his suffering and binding up his wounds as best he could while someone went for a rig that the in-

jured man might be carried back to town more easily.

"Now, put some of that stuff on Mr. Carson's hands," commanded Tabitha, who had watched the proceedings with interest, holding bandages and passing ointments under the physician's directions. "His are all scorched, too."

"How are your own?" someone asked her, noticing how drawn and white her face was in the lurid glare.

"I did that making candy last evening," she answered, displaying her blistered fingers, now raw and sore. "I forgot all about them."

Overcome by excitement, weariness and pain, she let the doctor gather her in his strong arms, and the proud citizens of Silver Bow bore their little heroine triumphantly home.

CHAPTER XII

DR. VANE HAS A VISITOR

By the next morning Tabitha had fully recovered from her terrible night's experience, but it was days before the old hermit awoke to consciousness to find himself lying in a white bed in the Miners' Hospital of Silver Bow with Dr. Vane bending over him and a motherly woman in white cap and apron moving about the room.

"Where am I?" he asked faintly.

"In the Silver Bow Hospital," answered the doctor.

"How came I here?"

"You were hurt. You mustn't talk now. When you are stronger you can ask questions."

"But I must know how I got here. Who found me? I was sick, I remember, and I think I tried to send Bobs for help, but he wouldn't leave me."

"You upset a lamp or something and set the

house afire. Catt's little girl discovered the blaze, gave the alarm and helped Carson haul you out. It was a tight pull, my man, but you will soon be all right now."

"Catt's girl? Carson?"

"Yes. No more questions at present. Save your strength and get well."

So the bandaged man lay quiet among the pillows and waited for health to return to him again; nor did he ask for further information until one day the doctor told him that on the morrow he might go for a walk in the open air if he wished.

"Could you bring that little girl to see me?" he asked, and the physician, surprised because the patient had never before manifested any interest in his rescuers, replied that he would see about it. So that afternoon when school had closed, Tabitha was met at the door by Dr. Vane and went with him to see the hermit of the hills, Surly Sim.

She found him sitting by the window, looking out toward the flaming west where the sun was already sinking behind the mountain tops, and he did not turn when she entered the room, or give any sign that he saw or heard her. She

waited in silence for some moments beside his chair, and then, thinking he had not heard her enter, she said timidly,

"How do you do, Mr. Hermit? Dr. Vane said you would like to see me."

The man started at the sound of her voice and turning in his chair stared so fixedly at her that she was frightened and wished Dr. Vane had stayed with her. "Is there something—can I do anything for you? Would you like to have me speak some pieces for you?" Poor Tabitha had not the faintest idea what to say to this man, whose scarred face shocked and disconcerted her, and there was no one in the room to help her.

"What's your name?" finally asked the hermit.

"Tabitha Catt."

"Pretty name!" He laughed mirthlessly and the girl shrank as if she had been struck. She had not expected him to make fun of her and was undecided whether to be hurt or angry. He was kind to animals; she had hoped to meet that same kindness toward herself.

"It's a horrid name, but I can't help it, for I didn't name myself," she answered with dig-

nity, resolved to hold firmly to the fiery temper that caused her so much unhappiness.

"Why don't you drop it and take some other?" he asked curiously, aware that she was making an effort to control herself.

"I did once," replied the girl with a dejected air, in such contrast to her former haughty bearing that he was amused. "But it didn't pay."

"Why not?"

"Dad made me take it all back."

"Tell me about it."

"That's all there is to tell. I let folks believe my name was something else and he made me tell them what it really was."

"What was the name you adopted?"

"Theodora Marcella Gabrielle Julianna Victoria Emeline."

"Whew! How could they ever remember it all? That's a long handle for a little girl."

"They called me Theodora Gabrielle for short."

He smiled in spite of himself. "And do you really wish your name was that whole string?"

"I did wish so once. That was when I was a

little bit of a girl. I am twelve now. In next April I will be thirteen. Girls are young ladies when they get into their teens, Aunt Maria says. If I could change my name now, I would rather it would be Theodora Eugenia Louise. That is shorter, and long names are not the style any more. Theodora was my mother's name and I should want that for mine always."

"Do you look like your mother?"

"I reckon not. She died when I was too little to know anything, but if either of us looks like her it must be Tom. I am afraid I resemble Dad."

"Afraid?"

He spoke this word with a peculiar rising inflection, but she did not catch the significance of the question, and replied, "Yes. He is tall and thin and black and slab-sided. That's me, too, except I am short yet; but I expect I will grow. Besides, I've got the Catt inside of me. I scratch like fury when I am mad. Now Tom doesn't get mad, though his name is almost, or just, as bad as mine."

"What do you get mad at?"

"Lots of things, but 'specially my name.

Folks make such fun of it and say the hate-fullest rhymes, and when they do that I just light into them with my fists."

"And you a girl!"

"I am always sorry afterwards, but then it is too late to help it. I've got to learn to let them tease without getting mad at all and then they won't torment me, but it is a mighty hard thing to do, I think. I've been trying for twelve years now and it is almost as bad as ever. Tom says I am doing splendidly, but he doesn't know how often I get mad."

"Where's Tom?"

"Going to college at Reno."

"College, eh? He's a smart boy, is he?"

"Yes, indeed! We're both smart." He laughed at her naive reply, and her face flushed, but she continued convincingly, "I am almost as far as I can get in school here. I am ready for Latin. Mrs. Carson says if I can't go to boarding school next fall, she will teach me herself, so I can keep up with Carrie."

"Why didn't you go this year?"

"There wasn't any money."

"Would you like to go?"

"Wouldn't I!" was the emphatic exclama-

tion, as she clasped her hands in rapturous longing.

"If you could have one wish granted what would it be?"

"What do you mean?"

"If you were told that you could have any one thing you wanted, what would you choose?"

"Only one?"

"Yes."

"Well, it would be pretty hard to choose. I want to go to boarding school awfully bad, but—I believe—I would choose a home like Carrie Carson's."

"Carrie Carson's! What is the matter with your own? Isn't your house as big as theirs or as nice?"

"No, but I wasn't thinking of houses just now. A house isn't a home always. Our house isn't. Tom and I are the home part of our house. Aunt Maria is housekeeper and Dad just stops there once in a while. They don't care about having a home, I reckon."

The man was silent with astonishment at her keen observations, and mistaking his silence for disapproval at her criticisms, she hastily re-

sumed, "The kind of a home I mean is where all the folks in it like each other and are always nice like the Carsons."

"So your father isn't like Mr. Carson?"

"Not a bit—yet."

"Is he mean to you?"

"N-o, not exactly. He is a Catt, that's all. I reckon it is me—I, who is mean. I get mad and sass him when he shakes me, and once when he whipped me I burned up his slippers."

"Does he whip you often?"

"No, this was the only time—so far. I spilled candy on his best hat, which is enough to make any man mad; but being a Catt, he was *very* mad. I haven't seen him since, because he is away on a trip, but when he comes back I am going to tell him I am sorry I burned up his shoes. I was just beginning to think maybe there was hopes of his being like Mr. Carson yet when I made him mad. Now I suppose I will have to begin all over again."

"Then you think your father is improving?"

"Why, you see, Dad has had a hard time of it. There have been so many things to make him feel bad. When he was in college he got expelled because of something dreadful an-

other boy did, and then a man who was working with him in the mines cheated him out of all his share, and mamma died, and money has been hard to get and—well, he got cross.”

“So he took his spite out on his children, eh? Who was the man who cheated him?”

“I don’t know, but Dad doesn’t believe in friends any more. He says there is no such thing as a true friend. Mr. Carson says that is because the man he trusted ‘betrayed his confidence’—those are his very words.”

The bandaged figure in the invalid chair moved uneasily, and a silence fell over the hospital room while he stared gloomily out into the fading light, and she sat lost in her own thoughts. Suddenly he roused, and his voice sounded sharp and curt as he said, “It is nearly night. Time you were going home.”

Tabitha’s face crimsoned at his peremptory dismissal, and she bounced out of her chair indignantly.

“You sent for me. I didn’t come because I wanted to. Good-by.”

She was gone before he recovered his breath, and never a word had passed between them concerning the fire which had so nearly cost him

his life, though his purpose in sending for her was that he might thank her for her bravery. He called after her, but she did not hear his voice, and the door closed with an emphatic bang which told him plainer than words how angry she was.

For a long time after she left him he lay quietly by the window in the twilight, thinking over what she had told him and battling with himself; but in the end his better nature conquered. The next day he went for his walk, as Dr. Vane had suggested, and that was the last Silver Bow saw of him for some time. Some folks thought he had met with foul play, others that he had wandered too far for his strength and had either perished or been taken care of by some prospector, while still others held the opinion that he had taken French leave. Speculation as to his disappearance soon died down, however, and Surly Sim, Tabitha's hermit of the hills, was forgotten.

The holidays came, bringing Carrie home for a brief vacation, and she was bubbling over with such enthusiastic reports of life at boarding school that Tabitha found it harder than ever to let her go back to enjoy the privileges

which were denied her. So great was her grief that after seeing her flaxen-haired playmate on board the train to return to her school, she rushed away to pour out her despair to sympathetic Mrs. Vane.

"I don't see why it is that some people have everything and others nothing," she sobbed bitterly. "I can't help envying Carrie. She has the nicest mother and father and the prettiest house and the loveliest books and clothes and all the money she wants. And so has Jerome. They both go away to school and have splendid times and see the world, and I can't have any of it."

"Poor little girlie!" murmured the woman to herself. "How unjust it does seem, even from a grown-up's standpoint!" So she stroked the heavy black hair and cuddled tearful Tabitha until the storm was spent; then she spoke tenderly, "That is one of the problems that has puzzled the world all these years, dear, and has caused all sorts of trouble. But it is something that we can overcome, every one of us, if we want to."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this, Puss; don't sulk and be cross be-

cause you can't have everything you want. Be happy where you were put. Did you ever hear the little poem called *The Discontented Buttercup*? It is the story of a buttercup who mourned because she couldn't be a daisy with white frills like her neighbor flowers, and she didn't see the loveliness of the day nor feel the softness of the breezes because she spent all her time in vain wishes. So she asked a robin who had paused to rest near her if he wouldn't try to find her a nice white frill some time when he was flying. And then these verses follow:

'You silly thing,' the robin said,
 'I think you must be crazy;
I'd rather be my honest self,
 Than any made-up daisy.

'You're nicer in your own bright gown;
 The little children love you;
Be the best buttercup you can,
 And think no flower above you.

Look bravely up into the sky,
 And be content with knowing
That God wished for a buttercup
 Just here, where you are growing.'

"Take this little lesson to heart, dear, and make sunshine where you are, instead of being sorrowful because you can't have what Carrie has. Maybe when you have learned the lesson thoroughly, these other things will come to you; but if they don't, then keep on making sunshine. Everyone loves a happy heart, and every smile or kind word spoken cheers the old world a little. Life is like a stairway, but because all of us can't reach the top of the flight, we should not sit down on the first step and mourn because we can't have what those on the last stair are enjoying. We must climb as fast and as far as we can if we want to make the most of our lives; but when we have done our very best, that is all we can do. If there are others who can do better than we can, we must try not to envy them, but be glad of their success. It is a question, dear, that you will understand better as you grow older. But if you will remember the buttercup verses and make the most of what you are and have, I am sure you will be happier."

"Teach me the verses, Mrs. Vane, and I will try to remember them when I get to envying again; though I still wish I could have nice dresses and go to boarding school."

Mrs. Vane smiled at her candor, but found the little poem for Tabitha, and when she skipped out into the dusk for home, she was saying over and over,

“Look bravely up into the sky,
And be content with knowing
That God wished for a buttercup
Just here, where you are growing.”

She had hardly disappeared over the hill when another visitor climbed the steep path to the Vane cottage and knocked. The doctor himself opened the door and was confronted by a tall stranger muffled to his ears in a heavy ulster.

“Come right in, sir,” said the doctor, motioning his visitor into the cosy office, and waiting for him to state his errand.

“You don’t remember me?” asked the man, as he sat down and threw open his coat. The voice sounded very familiar, but at first the doctor could place neither face nor figure. Then he remembered—it was Surly Sim.

“Well, well, where did you come from? I have often wondered what became of you. This country is a bad place for a sick man to get lost in.”

The hermit laughed. "I had some business that had to be attended to and I was afraid you wouldn't let me go so soon. Can you keep a secret?"

The doctor was startled at the abrupt question, but replied gravely, "That is part of a physician's life."

"Yes, but I have no reference to your professional duties. I mean this—I want you to take this money and see that Tabitha Catt is educated—boarding school, college, whatever she likes. I think that sum will cover—"

"Why don't you take it to her yourself?"

The doctor was more than puzzled at this unusual request from such a person as Surly Sim, the supposed crazy man, the hermit of the hills.

Startled at the unexpectedness of the question, the man stammered confusedly, "I—no—I can't—not yet. I have reasons for preferring to handle the matter in this manner at present. You need have no scruples. I earned every cent of *this* money; it is my very own. The child saved my life, and I owe her whatever help I can give her. This is a little sum, but it is the

best I can do just now. Will you take it and do as I ask?" Still the doctor hesitated. "Then see here, perhaps I can convince you of the truth of what I say. Read this." He laid on the table before the doctor a written document which the physician carefully perused, and laid back on the table. "Do you believe me now?"

"Yes."

"And will you take the money for the little girl?"

"Yes, but I wish I could convince you that it would be better for you to go to Mr. Catt—"

"Not yet, not yet! I can't meet him yet. He mustn't know who I am yet. When I have righted the wrong, then I will come back; but for the present I would ask you to keep my secret and see that the little girl is sent to school. You will do this?"

"To the best of my ability."

They shook hands and out into the darkness the hermit went.

CHAPTER XIII

AUNT MARIA DECIDES THE QUESTION

“Behind him lay the gray Azores,
Behind the gates of Hercules;
Before him not the ghost of shores,
Before him only shoreless seas.
The good mate said: ‘Now must we pray,
For lo! the very stars are gone;
Speak, Admiral, what shall I say?’
‘Why say, sail on! and on!’

There goes another cup. I am always forgetting and letting my hands fly when I speak. Yes, Aunt Maria, I am coming.”

“Hurry up with those dishes, Tabitha, I want you to run down to the McKittrick’s and get me that pattern she promised to loan me. Child, what have you done? I don’t know what we will eat out of when you get all these dishes broken. How did you smash that?”

“It banged against the door when I opened it.”

“I’ll warrant you were haranguing around with another new piece. Why don’t you pay

attention to what you are doing until it is finished, and then do your reciting?"

"I just hate to wash dishes and dust and sweep, Aunt Maria, but I forget all about it when I am speaking and get through with them lots quicker."

"Yes, but see how many dishes you break, and the things you spill because you will flap your arms about like a Dutch windmill instead of keeping them in the dishpan where they belong. I do wish you would learn to do one thing at a time."

"It is of no use, Aunt Maria. My thoughts won't stay on dishes, try as hard as I will to keep them there. There isn't anything splendid or inspiring in a pile of dirty dishes or those dusty chairs, is there? But those poems are simply grand! I am the best speaker at school, but I have to practice all I can to keep ahead. Just listen to this:

"Then, pale and worn, he kept his deck,
And through the darkness peered that
night.

Ah, darkest night! and then a speck—
A light! a light! a light! a light!

It grew—a star-lit flag unfurled!
 It grew to be Time's burst of dawn;
 He gained a world! he gave that world
 It's watch-word: 'On! and on!'

Isn't that perfectly grand?" The black eyes glowed, the face lighted with enthusiasm and her whole form swayed with the stirring inspiration of the lines.

Aunt Maria was visibly impressed. "Yes, it is fine and you certainly do put life into anything you say; but that's just it, you put too much life in it and smash up everything you touch. Hurry now and get that pattern, for I want it as soon as possible."

"All right, I will be back in a jiffy." Tabitha snatched up her sunbonnet and disappeared up the path toward town, still reciting, "Sail on! sail on! and on!"

And silence descended upon the cottage that bright Saturday morning, for Aunt Maria was too much absorbed in some very important sewing to pay any attention to the housework and cooking still waiting to be done. In the midst of her thoughts as she sat puzzling over a fashion book, came the sound of an incessant buzz-

ing or hissing, so unlike any noise she had ever heard that she paused in surprise to listen.

"Now, what in creation has that child done this time?" she exclaimed after a moment. "It doesn't sound like the tea-kettle or as if she had left the water running. What can it be? I have to follow her around like I would a baby—she is that careless!"

With an impatient sigh the woman dropped her work in the nearest chair and shuffled out to the kitchen to investigate the peculiar sound, formulating in her mind a lecture to be delivered to the erring Tabitha upon her return from McKittricks.

But the lecture was straightway forgotten in the sight that met her gaze as she stepped into the room; and she stopped, paralyzed with horror. In the middle of the floor, coiled as if ready to strike, lay a long, hideous snake, its head raised, forked tongue darting, and hissing that ceaseless buzzing note that had attracted her attention in the first place; while around and around the reptile circling nearer and ever nearer, walked the hermit's crooked-tailed, cropped-eared cat, its back arched, tail erect, fur standing stiff all over its body, and round

yellow eyes glued in fascination to the enemy luring her to death. Not a sound did the poor cat make, but continued her march with a spasmodic rhythm that would have seemed ludicrous had it not been so pathetically fearful. Even Aunt Maria's arrival upon the scene did not break the charm, and the horrified woman stood still in the doorway too frightened to move, too terrified to call, too shocked to think. It was almost as if the snake had cast its horrible spell over her, also.

“Hurrah! the foes are moving. Hark to the
mingled din
Of fife, and steed, and trump, and drum, and
roaring culverin.”

The sound of Tabitha's hurrying steps outside, and the fresh young voice thrilling over those familiar words brought the woman to her senses, and with a cry of desperation, Aunt Maria caught up the heavy ironing board in the corner and banged it with all her strength full upon the hissing coil on the floor, regardless of the fate of the cat. But the hysterical scream of the woman had broken the charm, and the frightened feline made a frantic dash

for the screen door, spitting and clawing in its frenzy to escape; while Aunt Maria, trembling and unnerved, sank into a sobbing heap on the floor, too much shaken to think of escape.

Such was the scene that confronted Tabitha, as she rushed up to the door, terrified by her aunt's cry and the wild scratching of the imprisoned cat. As she flung open the screen there was a flash of black, a quavering meow and pussy, crazed by her terrible experience, streaked out of sight up the mountainside. But Tabitha did not pause to watch her flight, so amazed was she at the sight of Aunt Maria in tears huddled in the corner and shaking as if with ague.

"Why, Aunt Maria, what is the matter?" she cried in scared tones, pausing just inside the door. "Are you hurt? Did the cat go mad? Were you ironing and the board tipped over?" She stooped to lift the heavy piece off the floor, and the woman suddenly found her tongue: "Don't touch it, don't touch it! There's a snake under it! Oh, oh, oh!"

"Are you bitten, Aunt Maria? Tell me, are you bitten?"

"Oh, that snake!"

"Shall I get the doctor?"

"Oh, that snake!"

Leaping across the board still pinning the reptile to the floor—dead or alive she did not know—Tabitha clutched the hysterical woman by the shoulder and shook her, demanding, "Tell me this minute if you are hurt!"

But Aunt Maria continued her incoherent cries, still rocking back and forth in her corner, too dazed to make any further explanations. Tabitha surveyed the scene in perplexity. What should she do? The Carsons were away from home and no one else near enough to summon to her aid. If the snake had bitten her aunt, something must be done at once. All the remedies for poisonous bites that she had ever heard of seemed to have slipped from her memory. It might be too late by the time a doctor could be called. Precious seconds were rapidly passing. Supposing the snake were not dead yet. She glanced at the board in the middle of the floor and fancied it moved. In desperation she seized the teakettle from the stove and let its scalding contents fly over the spot where the snake might be.

At that instant her eyes fell upon the flask

her father carried on his trips among the mountains, and she remembered in a flash that whiskey is a good antidote for rattlesnake bites. This might not be a rattlesnake and it might not even be a poisonous one, but she would take no chances. Snatching off the cap, she poured a stream of the fiery liquid into the woman's open mouth, nearly strangling her. Choking and spluttering, Aunt Maria tried to scream, but could only gasp for breath, and to Tabitha's frightened eyes her face took on a dying look. A pail of water stood on the stand under the faucet, and catching up this, the child deluged the convulsed form in the corner.

There was a sharp in-drawing of breath, a sound of mingled surprise and wrath, and the irate aunt towered above the astonished girl, her eyes blazing as Tabitha had never seen them before.

"Tabitha Catt!" she managed to articulate, "of all outrageous things I ever heard tell of in my life! What do you think you are doing? Trying to murder me? Haven't I had enough scares this morning without your burning the skin all off my mouth and throat and choking

me half to death and then trying to drown me? What do you mean by it, I say?"

"Oh, Aunt Maria, are you bit?"

"Bit, bit, bit, did you say? Yes, bit by that fire you poured into me. What did you think bit me?" She had forgotten all about the snake! And Tabitha had difficulty in explaining the situation to her.

But that decided matters for Aunt Maria. She had hated the desert ever since she had come there nearly four years ago, and this was the last straw. What did she care if the snake did prove to be a harmless thing? If she couldn't live in a house without being in danger of a snake invasion at any time, she simply would not live there at all. Her temper was thoroughly aroused, and when Mr. Catt arrived home that night she made known her decision in no gentle terms to him.

"I have lived in this forsaken hole just as long as I am going to, Max Catt! I've routed out centipedes and scorpions and poison bugs of all kinds until I am tired of it. Tabitha caught a baby tarantula under her bed the other morning, and we found something in the wood-pile last week that the folks at the hotel

called a Gila monster. Why, one can't stir around here in the spring and summer without running the risk of getting killed by some of your varmints, and I've had enough of it. I am going back to civilization."

"Now, Maria, be sensible. That snake couldn't have got into the house if the screen had been shut the way it should have been."

"I suppose the spiders and centipedes come in through the open screen, too, don't they, and roost in the dishpan hanging on the wall! That is where I found one not long ago, and I caught another stowed away in my clothes when I went to dress yesterday. I don't dare go to sleep nights any more for fear they will bite me. Life is a perfect nightmare. It is bad enough to have to stay here nine-tenths of the time with nobody in the house but Tabitha, without being in constant fear of one's life all the time."

"How many people do you ever hear of being killed here on the desert by centipedes or scorpions or tarantulas, or even snakes? I tell you they aren't half as bad as they are made out to be."

"Well, I ain't going to risk my life to find

out how poisonous they are, Maximilian, and you needn't think it."

"But Maria, what will become of Tabitha? She can't stay here alone and keep house," he argued.

"There ain't any need of her staying here alone. She can go to boarding school in Los Angeles with Carrie Carson. If you weren't so thoroughly selfish you would have sent her there long ago with your own money; but even now when that hermit she saved from being burned up has given her enough money to put her clear through college, you won't let her touch a penny of it."

"Maria Catt, how am I to know that money was honestly his? I believe he stole it, and I don't care to get mixed up in any robbery case. There is something underhanded about the deal or he would have come to me with the money. I may be selfish but I am not dishonest," he ended, hotly.

"Dr. Vane is satisfied, and he is a shrewd enough man to know what is what. That hermit wasn't a robber and you know that without any proof. He has mining claims here that prove where he got his money."

"Then why didn't he turn it over to me, instead of to the doctor? He has virtually made Dr. Vane trustee of those funds."

"That only shows he has some sense," his sister interrupted with energy. "You don't know how to look after a child properly. But you know well enough why he didn't come to you. How could he, with you off chasing up syndicates and other fools to buy up your claims—"

"Those claims are worth money, Maria Catt, and some day I will prove it to you. I wouldn't think of parting with one of them if I had the money to work them the way they ought to be worked. The 'Tom Cat' is particularly promising."

"That may be, but it is a sin and shame to pay more attention to those old mines than you do to your children. Here is Tom working his way through college when it is your duty to put him through—"

"I told Tom long ago that if he wanted a college education he would have to earn it. I can't see that University courses make any better men of the boys that get them than experience does of the boys that are not as well edu-

cated. In fact, I think—and always did—that experience is the best teacher.”

“You’ve got a grouch against the world because you think it hasn’t treated you right, and you’re spitting your spite out on your children. Here is Tabitha, now,—as bright a child as I ever laid eyes on—”

“And as ugly a one.”

“Whose fault is that, Maximilian Catt? If she had been brought up differently she would compare favorably with any child in the country. She *does* compare favorably in spite of her bringing up. The teacher says she never had such a bright scholar in all her school experience. She learns surprisingly quick.”

“I don’t see anything surprising about that. The Catts are not ignoramuses, none of them.”

“I know that all right. I’m a Catt myself, and while I never set myself up to be overly quick-witted, I think I have my share of brains, and might have amounted to something if I had some more education.”

“Shucks! What are you always harping on that string for? Education isn’t everything in the world. Tabitha can get all the learning a woman needs right here in this town.”

“Because the girl hankers for knowledge, you are just determined to make her as miserable as you can, and if she was half as much Catt as you are, she would grow up just as spiteful and selfish; but thank goodness, she has some of her mother’s traits. If she was a little mite and needed my care, I would stay, even if I did get killed for my trouble; but she is big enough now so I can leave without any qualms of conscience, and I am going to leave. You can do just whatever you like with her, but I will not stay here for love or money. Find a housekeeper if you can, but whether or not you do, I am going back East just as soon as I can get my things packed. I am absolutely unnerved over that snake. I can’t turn around without seeing the thing coiled ready to spring, and that poor cat chasing around like a thing crazy; and when I shut my eyes there are whole strings of ’em dancing up and down like all possessed until I am half wild. That cat never came back and I believe that is a warning. I am going to follow its example.”

No arguments could prevail to change her mind, and she immediately began packing for her departure.

Poor Mr. Catt, what was he to do? The possibility of Aunt Maria's leaving them had never occurred to him, in spite of her oft repeated threats; and now that she had suddenly determined to return to her own home he was facing anything but an agreeable situation.

It was out of the question for Tabitha to take charge of the housekeeping and stay there alone much of the time as she would have to do when he was away. It was equally out of the question to secure a reliable housekeeper in this little desert town. But the idea of accepting the hermit's money and sending her away to school was very repugnant to him and he was at a loss to know what to do.

Aunt Maria's fright had given her unusual courage and she had told him some unpleasant truths, things she would never have dared say under ordinary circumstances; but after his surprise at her daring had died down he faced her accusations, fought them out one by one, recognized the truth of them and capitulated. Tabitha could go away to boarding school. Words are inadequate to express Tabitha's joy when told this delightful news; she was literally entranced with the prospect.

The night that Aunt Maria had departed for her eastern home, Tabitha sat disconsolately on the back steps, alternately patting General Grant's head resting on her knee, and trying to study her grammar lesson, but the nouns and verbs would become hopelessly mixed, and the adjectives and adverbs fought scandalously with each other. Mr. Catt, tilted back in his chair beside the window, tried to read the city paper, but found his glance wandering constantly to the lonely figure on the steps.

"I am a beast," he said to himself, as the brown hand swept a tear off the page she was supposed to be studying. "This is no place for a child like that. She has the making of a fine woman in her, and I haven't done right by her. She *is* bright, and Maria is right. Tabitha!"

She started violently. "Yes, sir."

"Come here."

Closing her book but keeping it clasped in her hands she went inside the house and stood waiting to know his pleasure, surprise—almost apprehension at this unexpected summons—showing plainly in her face. "You were reciting some gabble on the steps a little bit ago. Say it again."

"Gabble?" said the puzzled girl questioningly.

"Yes, something about Ghent."

"Oh, that wasn't gabble! That is a masterpiece, teacher says. Why, Robert Browning wrote that!"

"Um-hm. I'm not interested in Robert Browning. All I want is that piece. Speak it."

Astonished and not comprehending this demand in the least, Tabitha began falteringly, somewhat indifferently :

"I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all
three;"

But as the familiar words slipped from her tongue, the spirit of the piece came over her. Her voice grew tense with feeling and the hands that never could stay still lent their aid to the difficult art of expression.

"So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the
sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless
laugh,

'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff;

Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,

And 'Gallop,' gasped Joris, 'for Aix is in sight!'

Her hand shot out toward the imaginary Aix, the ill-fated grammar was forgotten, it slipped from her loosened clasp, flew through the air and struck the elder Catt a heavy blow in the stomach.

"Uh!" grunted the startled man, the tilted chair tipped uncertainly, he clutched wildly at the smooth wall, and landed in an undignified heap in the middle of the kitchen floor, rapping his head smartly against the pantry door.

"Tabitha Catt!" She held her breath in dismay and waited for the punishment she was sure would follow. "Go on with that piece!"

Nothing could have surprised her more than that command, and for a brief moment speech forsook her. Then gathering up her scattered wits, she finished her recitation with all the vim she could muster, and waited. Though possessing a keen sense of the ludicrous, Tabitha's own troubles never appealed to her in this

light, and as she stood looking down at the tall form sprawling on the floor, the amusing side of the situation never occurred to her. She was too busy wondering what would come next.

"Hm!" was the unexpected comment after a thrilling silence. "You did well in the first part, but toward the end where the excitement should increase, you let it fall. How would you like to go to boarding school with Carrie in September?"

"Oh, Dad, if I only could!" The voice and face expressed all the pent-up longings of the little heart, and Mr. Catt felt a great lump rise in his throat as he watched this one small daughter and realized his own shortcomings; but he swallowed it back and said briefly, "If you are a good girl, I reckon maybe you can go."

A long sigh of rapture burst from her, and seizing her father's black head in her arms, she gave it a quick, impetuous hug. Then, disconcerted by this unusual display of affection, she fled out of the house and up to her seat on the mountainside, overlooking the ruins of the hermit's hut, where she held an ecstatic thanksgiving service all by herself.



CHAPTER XIV

TABITHA'S ROOM-MATE

The long, hot summer weeks came to an end at last, the dainty dresses were finished, the trunk packed, the short journey completed, and Tabitha stood breathless and quaking on the great stone steps before the goal of her ambitions, with the confident Carrie and timid Mercedes beside her, waiting to be admitted to the imposing edifice.

"I can't believe yet that I am really here," she sighed.

"Oh, that feeling will soon wear off," answered Carrie, and then the heavy door swung noiselessly open and Carrie motioned the two girls into the cool shadows of a wide hall, which to Tabitha seemed more like a beautiful garden than the interior of a house, for ropes of glossy-leaved ivy festooned the long, French windows, and palms and tall vases filled with flowers occupied every available nook and corner.

"Isn't it grand?" she breathed in ecstasy. "I shall love it here, I know. I do hope I can room with you, Carrie."

"Sh! I am afraid you can't, Puss, but maybe you and Mercedes will be put together. Here comes Miss Pomeroy, the principal."

A stately, silvery-haired lady in shining black was approaching them through the great doors at the end of the hall, and Tabitha eyed her with sudden disfavor.

"I don't see how I can hope to like her when I shall always think of that sneaking Joe and Sneed Pomeroy in Ferndale every time I hear her name." But the moment the woman spoke, she forgot everything else in listening to the sweet, musical voice that somehow made one instantly feel at home and welcome.

"My dear Carrie," the lady was saying, as she kissed the rosy cheek of the flaxen-haired child. "I am so glad you have come back looking so well. And these are your little friends of the desert! Which is Tabitha, and which Mercedes? We are delighted to have two more Silver Bows with us this year. Carrie and I are great friends, and I am sure we all shall be."

"Has Cassandra come yet?" asked Carrie eagerly, and her face fell when Miss Pomeroy smilingly nodded her head.

"Why, Carrie Carson, are you sorry?"

"N-o, but if she is here I suppose I can't have Tabitha for a room-mate."

"You precious little girly! No, I have made other arrangements for Tabitha and Mercedes. Cassandra's mother wrote and asked me particularly if her daughter might not have 'dear little Carrie Carson' for room-mate again this year, for the child adores her and will do anything in the world to please such a lovable child. Now surely after that plea you aren't going to desert poor Cassandra?"

"Oh, Miss Pomeroy, I do like Cassandra ever so much, but—I would like to have Tabitha better."

"And how about Mercedes?"

"She is almost Cassandra's age, and they are sure to be friends."

"Aha! had it all planned out, did you, little sly-boots?" laughed the woman, gently pinching the flushing cheek of the embarrassed Carrie. "There, dear, I was just teasing. I want

to please all my girls, but sometimes I have to disappoint them a little. Mercedes will room with Bertha Peck who was here last year, and Tabitha we will try with Chrystobel Clayton. Come now, and I will show you your rooms. Bertha is here already, but Chrystobel has not arrived. Carrie, you have the same room you had last year, and little Cassandra is busy decorating it now—a labor of love, dear.”

Up the wide, polished stairs she led them, and along the corridor, on either side of which were several doors, most of them closed, but through the two or three standing ajar Tabitha's bright eyes caught glimpses of merry-faced girls in the midst of an interesting clutter of open trunks, over-loaded beds and bureau drawers, and her quick ears heard snatches of rollicking music or the buzz of gay conversation.

“This is your room, Tabitha. Mercedes is your next-door neighbor, and Carrie is just across the hall. Go in and make yourself at home. Bertha, come welcome your roommate.”

A tall, fair-haired girl rose from the low rocker by the window, and came quickly for-

ward, saying cordially, "Mercedes, I am glad you have come. I have been here three days and am beginning to be homesick. Isn't that a state of affairs? You don't look a bit as I thought you would. Has your trunk arrived yet? And this is Tabitha, our little kitty? You certainly must be our mascot. Your room-mate isn't here yet, so you can help yourself to whichever bed and closet hooks and bureau drawers you want. There really isn't any difference in the size of them, but it is supposed to be a great thing to have first choice."

While the older girl talked she drew Mercedes inside the room, divested her of hat and satchel, jerked out the empty drawers of the dresser, and threw open the tiny closet door with such a hospitable air that the homesick child of the desert felt cheered and comforted at once, and Tabitha found herself wishing it had been her lot to share Bertha's room.

It was lonely all by herself in the room that seemed bare in spite of its pretty furnishings, for nothing familiar greeted her eyes, and its unadorned walls looked quite depressing in their spotless creamy white. Carrie had disappeared, and Miss Pomeroy's steps were de-

scending the stairway; so she closed her door quietly, observing that two or three curious faces were peering at her from across the hall; and with a feeling half homesick, half exultant, Tabitha hung up her hat and turned for a more studied survey of her surroundings.

“Twenty-eight hooks in the closet, fourteen for me and fourteen for Chrystobel. Isn’t that the loveliest name? I never heard of it before. I wonder if she will be as nice as she sounds! But of course she will. Carrie says the girls are all nice. Four drawers in the dresser, two little ones and two big ones. I will take the bottom big drawer and the little one nearest the window. Bertha says the drawers are the same size, but the bottom one *looks* a little deeper. Here is a string, I will measure.—They are exactly the same. That’s where you got fooled, Tabitha Catt! See what comes from being stingy?—I would like the bed nearest the window, but maybe I better leave that for Chrystobel.—Clear as crystal and sweet as a bell. I wonder if that is what her mother and father thought when they named her that. These rockers are i-den-ti-cally the same. That’s fortunate. It won’t be any temptation

to choose the prettiest. We will have to tell them apart by putting bows on them. I will tie one of my red hair-ribbons on mine; there are four new ones in my box of ribbons. I wish they would bring up my trunk. I would like to unpack while I have nothing else to do. Wonder where Carrie is. Wish she would come in and talk to me, it seems so strange here all alone."

There was a bold knock at the door, and thinking it might be her trunk, she flung it wide open with the words, "Bring it right in, please, and set it in—oh, I thought—"

"You thought it was your trunk," giggled the lisping midget who faced her in the doorway, "but it ain't. I am Cassandra Hertford. Carrie is my room-mate. Isn't she a darling? She told me you and Mercedes McKittrick had come, and I had to run in to see you. Carrie has gone to see about the trunks. She said she would introduce you when she came back, but I couldn't wait. Where's Mercedes? Oh, she is to be with Bertha Peck, isn't she? Let's go see her."

Clutching astonished Tabitha by the hand, she dragged her out of the room and before

any remonstrance could be offered, pushed open the door of the next apartment and announced her arrival with the shout, heard all over the hall, "Hello, Bertha and Mercedes! Here I am with our Tabby Catt!"

Tabitha's sensitive face flushed crimson and the angry light sprang to her eyes, but Bertha rose to the occasion with the ready tact which had made her one of the most popular girls.

"Cassandra, dear, this is our Kitty, the mascot of this floor. Come and meet her, girls;" and before Tabitha realized what had happened, six or seven laughing girls emerged from the various rooms along the hall, and surrounded her, all chattering gayly and apparently not noticing Tabitha's awkward, embarrassed manner. Carrie joined them shortly, and received an enthusiastic greeting, for it was evident that she, too, was a general favorite. And such a laughing and chattering as followed! And how the time flew! In the midst of their merrymaking a gong sounded.

"Goodness gracious, girls! is it so late? I haven't finished unpacking yet. Half an hour to get ready for tea, Tabitha;" and they dispersed to their rooms.

Tabitha followed their example and flung open the door at the end of the hall for the final touches to her toilette, but stopped on the threshold in surprise. Standing in front of the mirror, arranging her long, smooth curls, was a girl about her own age, clad in an over-trimmed gown of thin white stuff, and wearing an immense bow of white at either side of her head. At the sound of Tabitha's entrance she turned languidly and surveyed the intruder with cold, disapproving eyes. Tabitha returned the stare with one of undisguised admiration, for never had she seen anyone so beautiful. "Oh, are you Chrystobel?" she cried in rapture. "I've been wondering if you would fit your name."

"I am Chrystobel Clayton," answered the stranger in a frigid tone which was entirely lost on the other. "Do I fit?"

"Oh, yes, you are the handsomest girl I ever saw. Carrie Carson is pretty, but you are beautiful!"

"What is *your* name?" asked Chrystobel, still with a haughty air, but considerably pleased with the open admiration of her companion.

"Tabitha Catt," came the slow answer.

"What an exceedingly queer cognomen!"

Tabitha caught her breath, then said slowly, "It isn't very pretty, perhaps; but—one gets used to their name so they don't mind it."

"Well, I must say if I had such an odd name as that I would change it. *I* never could get used to it; but then, some people haven't as sensitive natures as others."

Tabitha made no reply, but with a queer sense of rage in her heart she walked across to the dresser and bent to open the lower drawer where she had carefully laid the few things her small grip had contained.

"Here," exclaimed Chrystobel sharply, "don't touch that drawer! That is mine. How dare you!" For Tabitha in her start of surprise had jerked the drawer free from the dresser and it fell with a bang in the middle of the floor, disclosing to view a disorderly array of garments which did not belong to Tabitha.

"What have you done with my things that were in there?" demanded the black-eyed girl indignantly. "I was here first and had the right to make first choice. It makes no differ-

ence to me, though; the drawers are just the same size and I would as soon have the other."

Without waiting for a reply, she reached for the upper drawer, but before she had a chance to open it, Chrystobel caught and held it shut as she cried angrily, "My things are in there, too. What did you expect—to keep the whole dresser for yourself?"

"That seems to be what you want," retorted Tabitha, thoroughly enraged. "What have you done with my things?"

"They are in the top drawers. You aren't entitled to more than two."

"I'm entitled to a big one and a little one, Chrystobel Clayton, just the same as you are, and I intend to have them, what's more!"

"Miss Pomeroy said it didn't make any difference which two drawers I took for my own—"

"She didn't say you could have both the big ones, and you aren't going to have them, so now!"

Snatching up the drawer on the floor, she emptied its contents on the nearest bed and turned to restore it to its place in the dresser, but the angry Chrystobel stopped her and

tried to take it from her hands, declaring, "That belongs to me, and you shall not have it, I say!"

Tabitha promptly inverted the disputed piece of property and sat down upon it, saying quietly, though her eyes flashed dangerously, "Get it if you can!"

But her companion dared not make the venture, for the clenched hands looked too formidable, and the spoiled Chrystobel was an arrant coward; so she stood beside the dresser glowering at the triumphant girl astride the drawer, and at last finding vent for her anger in the spiteful remark, "Your name fits you exactly. All cats scratch!"

"Well, your name doesn't fit you at all," was the ready reply, "and I was mistaken when I said you were the prettiest girl I had ever seen. I take it all back. You're as ugly as sin!"

"Are you going to give up that drawer?"

"No, not if I have to sit on it all night. You can't be a pig if you are going to room with me. I took only what was my right. You have no business to claim both big drawers."

"I didn't want to room with you anyway—"

"Neither did I want you!"

"I shall tell Miss Pomeroy!" threateningly.

"I wish you would!"

"There goes the gong for tea!"

"I am willing. I'll go without supper before I will give up this drawer, and you may as well understand that first as last."

"You are perfectly hateful! You aren't even decently polite."

"I can't see that *you* have more than your share of manners."

"You are as horrid as your name."

"You are a great deal worse than yours!"

"Girls, girls! What is the reason that you are not down in the dining hall?" Miss Pomeroy, stately, majestic and stern, stood unannounced in the doorway.

"She won't let me have a drawer to put my things in," began the girl with curly hair and the handsome face.

"That's a lie!" screamed Tabitha, bouncing to her feet and dancing up and down in furious passion.

"Tabitha Catt! I am surprised at you!" exclaimed the principal, looking sorrowfully at the angry child. "Chrystobel, what is all this racket about?"

"I put my things in the dresser, and she said I had taken her drawer and couldn't have it."

"She did take my drawer—"

"Tabitha, I am talking to Chrystobel now."

"She took both big drawers and—"

"Tabitha!"

"Expected me to have just those two little ones in the top—"

"Tabitha!"

"She said you said she could have her choice and—"

"Will you listen to me?"

"She dumped my things out of the drawer—the bottom one—and poked them in those little mites of ones. It isn't fair—"

"Tabitha Catt!"

"For her to have two big ones and me two little ones, but—"

"Tabitha, leave the room until I call you again!"

"She wouldn't give up either one," and in a perfect storm of grief and anger, Tabitha swept out of the room, her expostulations still pouring in a torrent from her quivering lips; and throwing herself flat on the hall floor, she buried her face in her arms.

For some minutes Miss Pomeroy's low, even voice could be heard in the little room at the end of the corridor, interrupted occasionally by Chrystobel's sullen tones; then Tabitha was summoned again, and with reddened eyes she entered the door to learn her fate.

"Tabitha, Chrystobel is sorry she took your belongings out of the bottom drawer without asking your leave, and she has put them back as she found them—"

"She has opened every blessed thing and peeked at it," was Tabitha's indignant comment as she saw the mussed-up contents of the lower drawer, now restored to its place in the dresser.

"Tabitha!" Miss Pomeroy's lips twitched, but her voice was very stern, and the maid from Silver Bow flushed redder than ever, and contritely cried,

"That was very hateful of me, but really, Miss Pomeroy, she never put those things back as she found them, because I had that drawer looking very neat and now see the muddle it is in!"

"We will discuss that later. I am shocked to think any of my girls would act in such an

unladylike manner as you have. Whenever any dispute arises over your possessions, you are to come straight to me, or to Madame Du-Bois, who has charge of this floor. Don't ever let me hear of such actions again. Now, in order to prevent any further dissension, we will decide which bed and chairs each of you is to have and which hooks in the closet."

Tabitha's eyes sought the open closet as Miss Pomeroy spoke, and now she burst out angrily, "She has taken all the hooks but seven on one end! I should have fourteen because there are twenty-eight in all."

"Tabitha, if I have to speak to you again for interrupting, I shall send you to the office to stay until bedtime. Chrystobel, take your clothes off seven of those hooks and give them to Tabitha. Now, Tabitha, which bed do you want?"

"I can't sleep near the window; mamma never allows it," spoke up the haughty Chrystobel.

"That suits me all right," thought Tabitha, but aloud she merely said, "It makes no difference to me."

"Then you may have the bed by the window.

As for the chairs, they are exactly alike—”

“I want this rocker,” interrupted Chrystobel again, “the other squeaks, and I can’t bear that.”

“Perhaps,” observed Miss Pomeroy sarcastically, “it would be advisable to mark your chairs with strings or ribbons, or something so there will be no possibility of a recurrence of this dispute. Come now to the dining hall and have your tea. I won’t punish you this time, but if such a disgraceful scene occurs again, I shall not be lenient with either one.”

“I don’t care where my things are put,” said irrepressible Tabitha, “and I’m not trying to be a pig, either, even if I was here first; but I do want what belongs to me by rights!”

Miss Pomeroy smiled in the dimness of the stairway, as she replied with emphasis, “I expect all my girls to obey the rules laid down for them, and if they won’t do that, then they can’t stay here.”

Tabitha’s indignation subsided suddenly. What a dreadful thing it would be if she should be sent home! She ought to have thought of that possibility before. Now Miss Pomeroy was angry with her and she had made

a miserable beginning of the delightful boarding school life she had dreamed so much about. Two hot tears gathered in her eyes again, but just at that minute she heard Chrystobel mutter between her teeth so the principal could not hear, "I hate you!"

"It's mutual!" was Tabitha's vindictive reply, and with head up, she stalked stiffly down the stairs behind Miss Pomeroy.

CHAPTER XV

THE FIRST NIGHT AT IVY HALL

That first night at Ivy Hall—for this was the name of the boarding school—was long remembered by Tabitha. Fifty bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked girls gathered with the little staff of instructors around the long tables in the breezy dining hall, laughing and chattering merrily about their happy vacations, greeting friends of the previous year with girlish enthusiasm, and welcoming the strangers among their number with a cordiality that made them feel as if they had always belonged there. It was such a wonderful experience to our little maid from the desert that she could scarcely touch the tempting meal spread before her, but sat like a statue, drinking in the happy scene with a hungry heart.

“See that little dark-eyed lady at the end of our table?” said a winsome-faced girl at Tabitha’s right, who answered to the name of Jessie Wayne. “She is Madame DuBois, the French teacher, who is in charge of our floor. Your room is across from Carrie’s, isn’t it?”

"Yes," answered Tabitha, shyly. "She looks as if she might be lovely."

"Oh, she is! Next to Miss Pomeroy, she is the most popular teacher here. The red-headed, cross-looking, fat woman at the second table is Miss White, who has classes in music and drawing. She is lots better than she looks. Miss Summers is the next teacher. People often mistake her for a pupil here. Isn't that a joke? She does look awfully young, but this is her fourth year at Ivy Hall. She is a darling, too."

"Who teaches Latin?" ventured Tabitha, as her talkative companion lapsed into silence long enough to take a bite of bread. "Carrie said there was to be a change this year."

"Yes, we have a new Latin instructor. Her name is Miss Cornwall. She is the one sitting in the corner, wearing glasses. She looks mighty severe, but I'll bet she can be jolly. Miss Pomeroy never has a cross teacher here. I heard her tell Madame that Miss Cornwall is to be on our floor, too. I suppose she will have the room next to Carrie's, as that is the only vacant one at that end of the corridor."

"Who is the tall lady at Miss Pomeroy's ta-

ble?" asked inquisitive Tabitha, eager to make the acquaintance of all the staff of teachers.

"Miss King, of the domestic science department. Oh, you will like her! She is splendid!"

"That's what you've said about them all," laughed the black-eyed girl, privately thinking she had found the Garden of Eden.

"Well, they are! Really, I believe Ivy Hall is the loveliest boarding school there is in the world. We are just like one great, big family here. Miss Pomeroy makes the *dearest* mother."

"What are the other teachers, then? Aunts?" Tabitha asked.

Jessie shouted. "I never thought of it before, but that is surely what they are, and they do give us the loveliest times, and make the lessons so interesting that it doesn't seem like study at all. But they are awfully particular. They won't take *any* kind of a girl here. She has to be well recommended and even then there are always about twice as many girls who want to enter as there is room for. This year there were forty who couldn't get in."

"Oh!" breathed Tabitha, recalling with

alarm Miss Pomeroy's words on the stairs. "Do they ever send them away after they have begun school here?"

"I—don't—know. Why, yes, sometimes. There was a girl here last year who cheated and took things that didn't belong to her and was real saucy to the teachers; and when she went home at Christmas time she never came back. She told us that she didn't want to, but I think Miss Pomeroy wouldn't let her. There goes the signal for assembly. We always meet just after tea each evening for chapel services."

"Chapel services?"

"Yes. We sing a hymn or two and listen to a short talk from one of the teachers before going up to our rooms for study. Likely Miss Pomeroy will speak tonight, as this is the first evening. Sit anywhere you wish. Here's a hymn-book."

Tabitha accepted the book, slipped into a vacant seat in the corner, and marvelled at the sudden hush that fell over the noisy throng as the silvery-haired principal arose to address them. This wise lady was not given to sermonizing, but talked in a confidential, motherly fashion, telling them of her hopes and

expectations for the school year lying before them, explaining the few rules it had been found necessary to lay down for the governing of so many active little bodies, and filling each girlish heart with inspiration and a desire to win this dear woman's approval.

"It is not our aim to make our school a prison," said the sweet voice to the attentive throng, drinking in every word. "We want our girls to be happy and light-hearted and gay; we hope to fill every hour with sunshine and music and laughter. We are anxious that each one of you shall love Ivy Hall with your whole heart—not merely because of the merry days you enjoyed inside its walls, but because of the lasting help you shall have gained here, for we are gathered under this roof to study, you know, and not to idle away the golden hours, but you will find there are many lessons to be learned in boarding school that are not contained in books. You are all away from home and its influences, many of you for the first time in all your lives; and it is the duty of this little band of teachers to train and instruct the minds and bodies intrusted to our care. This is a pleasant task for us, and we shall do

our best for each individual girl, but in return we shall expect you to do your best for us.

“Our lives are like gardens; our faults are the weeds, our good traits the flowers, and we are the gardeners. If we are careless and do not try to overcome the faults, they flourish and grow stronger each year, and in the end will choke out all the flowers. While if we honestly seek to cultivate the good qualities we all possess, and to weed out the unworthy acts and thoughts, our gardens will grow beautiful and will be a pleasure to all our friends, as well as to ourselves. I hope my girls will all try to root out the weeds in your lives—the hot tempers”—Tabitha thought the kindly eyes looked straight at her as these words were spoken—“thoughtless words, selfish habits, envy, jealousy, and the countless other things that make so many lives unhappy. Cultivate kind thoughts, gentle words, good deeds, unselfishness and sunny dispositions. Don’t let bickerings or harsh speeches or unkind acts mar the spirit of harmony we want in our school. Take for your motto the Golden Rule, and treat all your companions as you would like them to treat you. Be the best girl you know how to be.”

From her corner of the room Tabitha sat glowering at Chrystobel opposite, trying to absorb the teacher's helpful words, while in her heart she was blaming her room-mate for the scene of the previous hour, and wondering how she could get even with the enemy. Chrystobel returned the sour looks with interest, even making a wry face occasionally behind her hand when Miss Pomeroy chanced to be looking in the other direction, for this spoiled maid was equally as sure that Tabitha was the sole cause of the disturbance.

But when the girls were all in bed that night, the lights turned out and the great building silent, Tabitha's anger abated, Miss Pomeroy's words kept repeating themselves in her mind, Jessie's unconscious warning filled her with uneasiness, gentle Mrs. Vane's motherly lectures came back to haunt her, and Mr. Carson's advice of long ago suddenly sprang into memory and would not let her rest. When she closed her eyes they rose before her inner vision in such a provoking fashion that sleep refused to come to soothe the tired, aching body.

"I have been hateful and horrid," sighed the weary girl at last, giving up the struggle and facing the accusing conscience. "No one will

like me if I behave like that. I promised Mrs. Vane to be good and just see what a beginning I have made! A scolding already and I haven't been here a day. Oh, dear! Chrystobel *was* selfish, but maybe if I had been good, she would have given up that drawer and the hooks without any fuss. I acted like a perfect—cat! Because she was selfish and—mean, yes, I think she was mean—that was no reason for my being hateful. Oh, it is such hard work to be good! I wonder if it will ever be any easier. Carrie doesn't seem to have any trouble that way at all, and her room-mate is a spoiled darling, too. If she can put up with Cassandra, I ought to be able to deal with Chrystobel. I suppose—I—ought to—tell her I am sorry. I hate to think of doing such a thing, for maybe she will be a—cat. Perhaps I needn't tell her, but just explain to Miss Pomeroy how bad I feel to think I made such a scene—no, I didn't fight with Miss Pomeroy, and apologizing to her won't make Chrystobel feel any better toward me. Oh, dear, I suppose I must do it! Well, here goes—I've got the shivers clear to my toe-tips already, thinking of what she may say. Chrystobel!"

She spoke the name softly, but the occupant of the other bed heard, and slowly turned over facing the window, surprised, wondering whether or not her ears could have deceived her.

“Chrystobel!”

There was no mistaking that sound. Should she answer? Chrystobel, too, had passed a very uncomfortable evening, and found bed far from agreeable. Away from her mother for the first time, she was battling with pangs of homesickness as well as with her conscience, for she had suddenly come to realize just how selfish her acts must have seemed not only to the queer little girl, who was to share this room with her, but also to the white-haired principal, whom she wanted to love her. But fear that Tabitha would only say something to make matters worse held her silent when she heard the whispered name from the bed by the window.

“Chrystobel!”

The voice was not only insistent, but pleading, and the elder girl lifted herself somewhat impatiently on her elbow, as she muttered ungraciously, “Well?”

"I was afraid you would be asleep," came the relieved reply. "Say, Chrystobel, I'm sorry I got mad this afternoon. Maybe if I had had more patience I could have shown you just how selfish you were without all that fuss and squabble. Will you forget the hateful things I said and be friends with me? You can have both big drawers and twenty-one hooks in the closet if you want them."

Chrystobel gasped, overcome by mingled emotions. Surprise, anger, regret in turn filled her heart, and for a moment she was silent because the lump in her throat choked her.

Tabitha, misconstruing the deep pause, began again anxiously, "I've got the worst temper in seven counties. I reckon it's my name; I have always hated it, but that doesn't help matters any. I am always sorry after I get mad like that, but it is awfully hard to say so. I never know how to say it so the other person will believe me. But I really mean it, Chrystobel. I am sorry I was so horrid to you. We ought to be friends, and then you could help me keep from getting mad, and I could help you not to be such a pig. Will you, Chrystobel?"

"Well," breathed her astounded room-mate, "you are the queerest girl I ever saw, and you say the oddest things. I—I don't know what to think."

"I don't mean to say odd things. I am truly sorry, and I wish you would believe me."

The plaintive voice was too much for the haughty Chrystobel, and with a quick spring she scrambled out of bed and groped her way to where Tabitha lay curled under the covers, saying with more real feeling than her companion had given her credit for, "I do believe you, and I am just as sorry as you are for my actions—sorrier, for I was to blame for the whole fuss. *I am* a selfish pig, but no one ever dared to tell me that before, so I have gone on being thoughtless and unkind and horrid. I have no brothers or sisters at home to share things with, and I have always had my own way until I've come to expect it from everybody, I am afraid. Forgive me, Tabitha, I never knew before how really selfish I was."

Chrystobel's arms had encircled Tabitha in an impulsive embrace, and before the astonished girl had recovered her breath sufficiently for a reply, there was a quick kiss pressed upon

her lips, and Chrystobel had slipped away in the dark to her own bed.

For a moment Tabitha lay motionless on her pillow, almost too surprised for utterance at this turn of affairs; then she smiled happily in the dark and whispered shyly, "I don't hate you, Chrystobel. I didn't mean all those hateful things I said to you. I was mad and that's why I spoke that way. I—I—love you."

"Then I'm glad," came the joyful answer through the blackness of the room. "I take back all the mean things I said about you, too, Tabitha. I am sure we are going to be splendid friends."

"So am I. Good-night, Chrystobel!"

"Good-night, Tabitha!"

A great peace descended upon both hearts, and the two girls drifted away to happy dreams, their differences forgiven and forgotten.

Oh, no, they did not become saints on the spot; they were only human beings like the rest of us, and many and frequent were the girlish squabbles that marred the serenity of those happy school days, but they honestly tried to do better, and that is half the battle. Chrys-

tobel *was* selfish and Tabitha *was* a pepperpot, and neither of those faults is easily overcome, but thanks to the common sense of the kindly principal and her staff of teachers, the battle was not unsuccessfully waged.

Tabitha soon became a favorite among her mates, who were quick to discover the sweet spirit under the fierce, hot temper, and quick to feel the lonely girl's craving for affection. Understanding that her home life had never been as glad and joyous as theirs, they one and all strove to make the new surroundings bright and beautiful, succeeding so well that gradually Tabitha forgot her old griefs and vexations, and blossomed into a serene loveliness that captivated both teachers and mates.

The name which Bertha had given her the day of her arrival clung, and Kitty she became to the whole school,—the mascot of the second floor. At one time this title would have been an added affliction to her over-sensitive nature, but Tabitha was growing wise, and was learning that people do not care how ugly one's name may be, if the heart is good and beautiful. True, she had not ceased to mourn be-

cause other girls were blessed with the pretty names which had been denied her, but she was beginning to understand the sentiment:

“Laugh, and the world laughs with you,

 Weep, and you weep alone;

For the poor old earth has to borrow its mirth,

 It has troubles enough of its own.”

CHAPTER XVI

MADAME'S ADVICE

One bright, warm, November day—for such days are the usual order in sunny California—Tabitha stood at the little window in one end of the long corridor, looking disconsolately down into the garden, shimmering in its rain-washed greenness, and thinking of the approaching holidays and her own slender purse. The other girls were making such elaborate gifts for each other, to say nothing of the beautiful things laid by for the home folks and friends, and she felt keenly the fact that she would have so little to offer. To be sure, there were few to remember outside the school circle of girls and teachers, but she longed as never before to do as the others did and have what they had.

“Oh, dear,” she sighed, “it’s hard to be pinched *all* the time! I wish I could have as much money to spend as even Mercedes has, and that isn’t a great deal, either. Here I

have only five dollars for Christmas, and there are about twenty girls, who, I know, are going to give me something, besides the other people I want to remember—Tom and the Vanes and Carrie's mother and father. They are always giving me something beautiful, and I never have anything for them but home-made candy. There is Aunt Maria, too. I would like to send her a little something so she won't think I have forgotten her; and then—Dad—but he won't expect anything or care. I don't suppose he will even remember that it is Christmas. Oh, hum! I wish there wasn't such a day!"

"Such a day as what?" asked a soft, sweet voice behind her, and an arm crept gently, almost shyly around her waist.

"Oh, Madame DuBois!" cried the startled girl, looking up into the winning brown eyes of the little French teacher. "Did you hear what I said? I was wishing there was no Christmas Day."

"No Christmas Day!" echoed the scandalized woman with charming accent. "Ah, zat is ze Christ's birthday!"

"I was very wicked," murmured Tabitha,

humbly. "I didn't stop to think how we happen to have that holiday. I was mourning because I have not as much to spend for pretty things as the other girls have."

"Oh, but zat is very wrong!" protested her companion, shaking her head in a disapproving fashion. "You Americans sink only of how much money you spend for Christmas and if your gift to your friend cost as much as ze one she give you. *Zat isn't gift!* Zat is exchange. One should give only from ze happiness of ze heart. If ze pocketbook is flat, zen pick a little flower, write a little letter, give a merry smile. All true friends like zat better zan silk dresses or gold watches. Do you forget one of your great poets has said:

'Not what we give but what we share,
For ze gift without ze giver is bare.'"

"I see what you mean, Madame," said Tabitha slowly. "Folks think too much about the cost of their gifts, instead of the spirit in which they are given. But wouldn't you feel badly if you knew that fifteen or twenty girls were planning splendid things for you and there was only five dollars to buy remembrances for all of them, besides the other friends? Cas-

sandra told me yesterday that Bertha Peck is embroidering a silk scarf for me, and here I haven't a thing for her!"

Madame smiled indulgently at the tragic tones, and gently shook the slender maid, as she answered, "Wie, I understand some how you feel, Tabitha; but it isn't worth fretting about. A little handkerchief, a card maybe—"

"One can't get a really nice handkerchief for even two bits, and it would take my whole five dollars for just the girls alone. I would have nothing left for Tom or the rest."

The little French woman was silent for a moment, and a deep frown wrinkled her usually placid brow; then she impulsively caught Tabitha's brown hands in her own and skipped joyfully as if she, too, were a girl in her teens, exclaiming excitedly, "I have it—zat what you say? You crochet. I have seen you sometimes when you study and I wonder how you count ze stitches and learn, too, but you always have your lessons well."

Tabitha's face flushed with pleasure at this unexpected praise, and she laughingly replied, "Oh, I can't always. It is just when I am

memorizing something or learning French conjugations. Now with algebra, I have to use my hands as well as my brains."

"Sly-boots! But you make pretty sings with your crochet hook—ze lace on Carrie's collar, n'est pas?"

"Yes, I made that for her birthday. Mrs. Vane taught me how last year in Silver Bow so I wouldn't be so lonely."

"It takes only a little time?"

"Not very long now. I have made so much of it I can almost do it in my sleep, and I can pick up new patterns from magazines by myself."

"Good! I, too, crochet—many sings once. I show you how if you wish."

"Oh, thank you, Madame DuBois! I shall be glad to learn."

"It is six, seven weeks before Christmas Day, and in zat time lots can be done. Come now to my room and we plan out zat five dollars—if you like—spend it on paper." She hurried the amazed girl down the long hall to her cozy room and was soon deeply absorbed in making out lists and figuring the cost of material.

"There are twenty-one girls I should like in particular to remember," said Tabitha, curiously watching every movement of her companion. "I wish I had something for each scholar. And five people in Silver Bow, and Tom in Reno, and—I wish Miss Pomeroy didn't limit us to such a little bit for the teachers."

"Ah, but she is wise!" laughed Madame, rapidly turning the pages in a fancy-work book. "See, here is what I mean. Twenty ties like zat take so little time and are so pretty and very acceptable. Every girl this day likes such sings. One spool of cotton thread, very fine, makes four or five, maybe more; a little scrap of linen to mount it on, and voila! a beautiful little gift that cost much at the store. Watch me now, how I do it." She caught up her crochet hook and thread, and deftly, swiftly, traced the delicate little pattern that Tabitha might see how it was done.

"That looks so easy," murmured the girl, watching the flying fingers with fascinated eyes. "I believe I could do it already."

"Yes? But you take the book to be sure. The directions are easy. That settles the girls

except maybe the little friend, Carrie. How would she like some slippers? I make them very pretty and they cost so little; two or three skeins of yarn for one pair and the soles are cheap, too."

"That would be fine for Carrie—and for Chrystobel. Cassandra says she has something beautiful for me, but Chrystie threatened to give her nothing for Christmas if she told; so she has managed to keep it secret so far."

"Cassandra has a lively tongue," laughed Madame, "and she finds it hard to control. Now for the rest of your friends, how would calendars do? You make beautiful water-coloring. Miss White shows me her pretty work, and always zere is one of your drawings. Cardboard is easy to get; a little bunch of flowers or some ozer design in colors, maybe a picture of yourself, and zat makes a nice gift."

"I had thought of pictures at first, but good ones cost so much that I couldn't get enough to go around."

"Pictures? Photographs, you mean. But maybe some friend has a camera and will take a—what you call it?—snap-shot? I know such a boy. He does excellent work and I am sure

Miss Pomeroy will let you go there some day with me. He charges very low. I sink one dollar would be all. Zen see! You have still one dollar and a half left out of your five dollars to buy ribbon, tissue paper, Christmas cards, postals or what you will, and all your friends are planned for."

Tabitha stared at the neat list with unbelieving eyes, then with a little jump of delight, she threw both arms around Madame's neck, crying happily, "Oh, you darling, you witch! I have been wondering and puzzling for a week to know how I could possibly get thirty-three presents out of five dollars, but it looks as easy as *a, b, c*, now. Thank you a thousand times! I am going to begin right away on my gifts, so everything will surely be finished in time."

"But you must attend to the lessons first," warned the teacher, shaking her finger playfully at the excited girl.

"Oh, I will, I surely will," she promised, gathering up book and papers. "I am so glad this is Saturday, for I can commence work at once. All my Monday's lessons are learned, Chrystobel and Cassandra have gone home for Sunday, and there is nothing to interfere."

"Then mind you don't work too hard, or I shall be sorry I helped you stretch your little gold mine."

"I will be very careful, but I *must* hurry, for there are only seven weeks before Christmas."

With a parting smile she slipped out of the door and rushed away to her own room, eager to make with her own hands the pretty lace Madame had begun for her; and from that moment all her leisure time was devoted to crocheting ties or painting calendars for her loved ones' Christmas Day. With the first gleam of dawn she was up in the morning, busy with brush or hook long before the breakfast bell called them to the day's routine; at recess and during the noon hour, she was hidden away with Bertha or Carrie in some nook of the great gardens, making frantic use of every opportunity; and when the lessons were learned in the evening, back to back with Chrystobel, she toiled with patient fingers, sighing with relief as each dainty tie was laid in state beside its finished mates in her big hat box.

Madame's young friend was glad to take

some kodak pictures of the eager girl, the prints were splendidly clear-cut, and Tabitha was delighted with the result. So when her busy brush had painted all the cardboard squares in soft colors, and the carefully trimmed snapshots were mounted, Tabitha's calendars were really works of art; and her heart was filled with happiness over what she had achieved.

Just a week before Christmas she slipped the last gift into the hat box and sat down before it to gloat over her treasures with loving eyes.

"All done—everything! I didn't suppose I could do it when I began. Now, I shan't be ashamed to receive gifts from the girls. It isn't right to feel that way, I know, but really I hated to think of not being able to give them something nice when they are so good to me. It isn't that I am exchanging, as Madame calls it; for I shall appreciate whatever gifts I get—silk dresses, Christmas cards, or just a friendly word; but this is the very first time I ever made things myself to give away at such a time, and I guess it has gone to my head. I like to receive presents, but *I* think it is lots

more fun to give them. I have enjoyed making every single one of those.

"There are twenty-two ties, nineteen for the girls, and one each for Mrs. Vane, Carrie's mother and Aunt Maria; there's a silk tie for Rosslyn McKittrick—I never would have thought of using up that bias piece for such a thing if I hadn't seen Jessie making her little brother one. I don't know which I like best, Carrie's blue slippers or Chrystobel's pink ones—they are both so dear. But my calendars are my darlings! When Madame suggested them, I was afraid they would be awfully cheap-looking, but Miss White says the coloring is the best I ever did, and those splendid pictures just finish them. I had no idea I was so good-looking. There is one apiece for each teacher, one for Tom, one for Dr. Vane, and one for Mr. Carson. That leaves me three over; and there may be someone I have forgotten in my list, so these will probably come in handy yet. And that prying Cassandra hasn't found out about a thing that I have made!

"Now I must get my hat and coat if I go with Madame for the tissue paper. How glad

I am that I can get a pretty postcard for each of the other girls! Even then, I will have more than half a dollar left. Perhaps I can find a piece of linen and make Tom a handkerchief or two. I'll ask—"

"Puss, Puss!" called an excited voice in the corridor, and an impatient fist pounded loudly on the door. Tabitha started nervously, dropped the cover down over her treasures and pushed the box hurriedly into the closet, calling cheerily, "Come in, Carrie!"

"I can't; you have locked the door!"

The black-eyed girl flew to turn the key, and rosy, excited Carrie burst into the room, crying, "See what I got for papa! It just came from the store. Miss Pomeroy helped me choose it. I wanted to show it to you first. Isn't it splendid? And won't he like it?" She laid a beautifully carved box on the table and danced gleefully about the room while Tabitha examined the purchase.

"Well, I should think he would," she said enthusiastically in answer to Carrie's question. "What is it for?"

"It's a sort of a writing-desk for him to carry around in his grip when he goes away, so he

can write any time he wants to. See the paper, business size, letter and note paper. Here is a box for stamps, and there is a place for pen and pencils. I wanted to get him a fountain pen, too, but mamma said she would attend to that, to be sure it was a nice one. I can just see him now when he opens it. Oh, I wish Christmas would hurry! What are you going to give your father, Puss?"

Tabitha's face flushed scarlet, and she murmured in embarrassment, "I don't believe he cares anything about Christmas. He never has observed it since I can remember."

"Oh!" said Carrie. "Well, I must take my box back and wrap it up. Where are you going?"

"It is nearly time for our walk and Miss Pomeroy has promised some of us a tramp to town for tissue paper, ribbon, cards and such little things that won't take long to get. Didn't you know? Ask her if you can't go. I think there are only six or seven of us so far. One more will only make it the jollier."

"I would like to," answered Carrie wistfully, "but this is my hour to practice for the cantata. Bye-bye!"

Carrie whisked across the hall to her room and Tabitha, haunted by that careless question, descended the stairs to wait for the group of shoppers to gather.

The day was bright and warm, the winter rains had washed the dusty foliage clean, and it seemed as if spring had already begun in this California city; but there was no answering note of joy in Tabitha's heart. Why had Carrie shown her the pretty writing-desk? What had prompted her to speak such disquieting words? Ought she to send something to the stern father who did not care?

"One should give only from ze happiness of ze heart, Madeline."

Madame's gentle voice floated back to Tabitha, speaking the same sentiment she had voiced to the black-haired girl a few weeks before. "A gift from a sense of duty is no gift at all."

"Then," thought Tabitha, "that settles my difficulty. I could give only from a sense of duty. I should like to love him, but he won't let me."

"But sink how lonely he may be, ze cross old uncle you talk about! Doesn't it make you

sorry?" came another snatch of conversation. "Perhaps he loves you more zan you sink. Oh, yes, I should get him somesing—a calendar or a card or maybe write a letter; but don't do it because you sink you ought. If he feels zat you really want to cheer him, it will make him happy even if he is cross."

The sunshine grew suddenly brighter to Tabitha, her heart grew wonderfully lighter, her lips unconsciously hummed a little tune and the walk the rest of the way to town was beautiful. But the first thing she did when Ivy Hall was reached, was to run up to her room, select the prettiest of the three left-over calendars, wrap it daintily in tissue paper and gold cord and address it to her father at Silver Bow. Then with a happy sigh she dropped it back into the box to await the proper time for mailing, and skipped off to tell Madame that her Christmas work was all done.

CHAPTER XVII

HOLIDAY PLANS

“Girls, girls!” cried Jessie Wayne, bursting unannounced into Bertha Peck’s room where ten or twelve of her mates were feverishly at work on Christmas mysteries, anxious to have everything complete before the morrow saw them scattered in their many homes for their holiday vacation. “Just listen to this. Mamma is going to give me a party Christmas Eve, and there are a hundred invitations sent out. Isn’t that gorgeous? The parties mamma gives are simply fine; almost everyone we invite comes. I wish we lived here in this city so I could have all of you. And New Years Day she is going to take six of us over to Pasadena in the auto to see the Tournament of the Roses and the chariot races. I have often been there, we go every year, but it is lots more fun with a crowd of people your own age. One day we are going up Mt. Lowe, and another day if it is warm enough she has promised to take us to one of

the beaches for bathing. I just love the ocean. Isn't my vacation going to be dandy?"

"I should think it is," exclaimed Chrystobel. "That's what I like—plenty of excitement. I tried to coax mamma to let me spend the holidays with my cousins in San Francisco, but she said to wait until next summer when she and papa could go, too. I don't know what they are planning for this Christmas, but I expect to have a jolly time."

"So do I," piped up the spoiled Cassandra, who could not be bribed or forced to stay away from these secret sewing bees, though she never pretended to do anything but pry. "We are going to San Diego to grandma's house for Christmas, and there is to be a real evergreen tree and loads of presents. I'm going to get a gold watch. I know, 'cause I teased mamma until she said she would buy me one."

"We have a family reunion at Redlands," said active Julia Moore. "There will be forty of us in all. Won't we have a merry time? I have two cousins whose birthdays are in the same week with mine, and folks call us the triplets, though Jack is a year older than I and Fred is a year younger. They are the greatest

teases, always playing jokes on me; so I have fixed up these two turkey wishbones to get even with them this year. Do you suppose they can find anything worse-looking to give me?" She held up two grotesque figures of wishbone and wax, dressed like Dutch boys in baggy trousers and queer caps, and the girls shouted derisively.

"If only I had seen them in time to plan one for Uncle Tim!" sighed mischievous Grace Tilton. "I owe him a philopena, and that would have been a splendid way to pay it."

"But it takes only a few minutes to make one," answered Julia. "I will show you how. Cousin Minnie cut the pattern for the trousers."

"I haven't the wishbone, though," returned Grace. "But never mind; Carrie is going home with me for Christmas, and we will think up something ridiculous."

"Why, Carrie!" cried Mercedes. "I thought you and Kitty were going home to Silver Bow."

"That is what we had expected to do, but just yesterday I got a letter from mamma telling me I might accept Grace's invitation, because papa has to go East right away on business and she is going with him."

"Then what are you going to do, Kitty?"

"Stay here at school," answered Tabitha briefly, stitching busily away on Tom's handkerchief, trying hard not to betray her keen disappointment at this unexpected change of plan.

"Oh, are you?" cried Bertha, dropping a dainty apron she was frilling with lace, and clapping her hands softly. "I am so glad! I was afraid I was to be the only girl left at school. I have to spend my vacations here, because I could hardly get home to Canada and back again before lessons would begin once more. Last year at Christmas there were three of us left-overs, besides Miss Pomeroy and Miss Summers; but during our spring vacation I was the only girl in the building, and perhaps I wasn't lonely, even though Miss Pomeroy was lovely. She always does everything she can think of to make the hours pleasant, and we had some grand visits together."

Tabitha's face had grown visibly brighter during this récitation, but the shadow of bitter disappointment still lingered in the somber black eyes, for she had counted much on having Carrie to herself for this brief fortnight and it was

hard to give up such fond hopes. Ever since boarding school life had begun these two bosom friends had seen little of each other, as Tabitha had now far outstripped Carrie in her classes, and Cassandra skilfully managed to monopolize her good-natured, loving little room-mate most of their leisure hours. Grace's invitation had included Tabitha, to be sure, but there was no money in the little purse for railroad fare, and of course it was now too late for her father to send her any, even if she had dared to ask him. So she stifled back her longings and tried to look happy as she said saucily, "Well, two is company, three is a crowd, four in the school-house are not allowed'."

"Oh," cried Cassandra, "you changed that—"

"Just to fit the occasion, my child," interrupted Bertha with a patronizing air which usually made the meddling infant grit her teeth and hold her tongue.

But in spite of Tabitha's efforts to be brave, Carrie saw the look in the black eyes and understood; and Chrystobel, detecting the slight quiver in the voice meant to be merry, understood also; and a sudden silence fell over the

room of busy workers. The waning afternoon deepened into dusk, Bertha rose and turned on the lights, the girls moved their positions so the bright rays would fall to best advantage on their work, but for many minutes not a sound was heard in the crowded room save the rustle of linen and lawn, and the snip, snip of glittering scissors. Then the tea-bell pealed out its summons, and the toilers sprang to their feet in dismay.

"So late! And my collar isn't done yet!"

"I have only the belt to put on my apron."

"All but about an inch of hemstitching done on this handkerchief."

"The initials are a little crooked on this glove-case, but I have finished. Thank goodness!"

Chrystobel said never a word, but gathering up her work with unusual haste, she flew to her room, switched on the lights, gave her beautiful curls a brush or two, jerked her collar over a fraction of an inch, and disappeared down the stairway before Tabitha had reached the door of Bertha's room. Straight to the principal's office she ran, knocked lightly, and almost before she heard the gentle summons from

within, she burst into the room with the breathless question, "Oh, Miss Pomeroy, can I stay here at school for the holidays? *May* I, I mean?"

"Why, my dear," smiled the white-haired lady, "my girls are always welcome here."

"But I thought during vacations you let only those who had nowhere else to go stay here."

"That is just because the girls who have homes to go to prefer to spend their holidays there, Chrystobel. It is unusual for a pupil to *elect* to stay here on such occasions, particularly at Christmas time. What is the trouble, dear? Have your parents—"

"Oh, no, it isn't that. They expect me, but can't I telegraph them that I want to stay here? They won't object. They always let me have my own way, Miss Pomeroy."

"But still I cannot understand your sudden decision, Chrystobel."

"It's on account of Kitty—Tabitha. She can't go home, and now that the Carsons have to leave for the East, she can't spend her vacation with Carrie, and she does feel so sorry!"

"What makes you think that?" asked the

principal with a curious tightening of her throat.

"Just her mouth, and because I know her. She laughs and pretends she doesn't mind, but I couldn't help seeing her lips; and she has never had the good times I have, and I—I thought maybe if I stayed here with her and Bertha, it would make them both feel happier."

Miss Pomeroy looked down into the eager, flushed face and wondered how she had ever called Chrystobel selfish; then she asked, "Have you counted the cost? If you stay here to make Tabitha's Christmas happy, she must never suspect any regrets you may feel because your own plans have been laid aside."

"I have thought about all that, Miss Pomeroy. She has been so good and patient with me that I should feel terribly mean to go home for a jolly vacation and leave her here."

"Very well, if you are sure you want to stay, you may telegraph your people for permission. Living so close to the city, you ought to get a reply in the morning before time to start for your home, if that is their wish in the matter."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Pomeroy!" cried the

girl in genuine gladness. "Mamma will let me stay, I know she will!" And as the second summons for the evening meal pealed through the building, she danced happily away to her place in the dining-room.

Hardly was the chapel service over when Carrie and Grace appeared at the door of the principal's domain, and the flaxen-haired girl began hesitatingly, "Miss Pomeroy, do you let girls stay here at school during the holidays if they can go somewhere else just as well as not?"

"Yes, my dear. *Any* of the girls are welcome to stay, though it is seldom one chooses to do so if she can possibly go home."

"Then may we stay? I had expected to go home, and then when Mamma wrote that they wouldn't be in Silver Bow themselves, I expected to go with Grace; but Tabitha can't and I don't want to leave her here alone."

"And if neither one of them will spend the vacation with me, I would rather stay here, too," said Grace. "I can telegraph to see if mamma will let me, but I know she will say yes."

"Bertha and Chrystobel expect to be here, you know," suggested Miss Pomeroy, watch-

ing to see what effect these words would have on the two supplicants.

"Chrystobel, too?" they cried in unison.

"Yes, she has just sent a telegram to her family."

"Then what a nice time we can give Tabitha!" exclaimed Carrie.

"She is always doing something for us," added Grace, "and it will be lovely to get even with her that way."

"Then you still wish to remain here for Christmas?"

"Yes, indeed," they answered, "if we may."

"I shall be glad to have so many of my girlies with me during the holidays, and I am sure Tabitha and Bertha will appreciate every effort you make to give them a happy time. Good-night, dears."

They scurried gleefully away, much delighted with the principal's decision, and already planning what they might do to fill the vacation days for Tabitha. As they pranced up the stairway, they met roguish Vera Foss hurrying toward the lower floor, and in answer to Carrie's laughing demand, "Where are you going, my pretty maid?" she said seriously,

"To ask Miss Pomeroy's permission to stay here over Christmas."

"Why?" cried the amazed conspirators in one breath.

"Oh, I just got to thinking how badly I would feel if I *had* to stay here for the holidays like Kitty and Bertha must, when everyone else is going home to parties and tournaments and gay times generally, and I thought it would be lots more fun for them if there were others here to keep them company. So when Aunt Lyda came for me, I asked her about it and she said I might stay if Miss Pomeroy would let me."

"Goody! She will. She said we might. When your aunt goes, come up to Grace's room and let's make our plans right away. We will get Chrystobel if she isn't with Puss."

The next morning when the bevy of bright-faced, light-hearted girls came to wish their teachers and two lone mates a merry Christmas before scattering for the holiday season, the four plotters, Chrystobel, Carrie, Grace and Vera, were foremost in the ranks, laughing and chattering the gayest of them all, as they jerked on coats and strapped up suitcases ready for departure.

"Here comes the bus," called someone.
"Grace, Carrie, where are you?"

"Where are the Monrovia girls? Oh, Vera, you are wanted."

"Chrystie, your turn next. Is this your grip? Good-by all! Merry Christmas!"

With a few final, hasty hugs, the quartette sprang down the steps, climbed into the waiting vehicles, and departed—to all appearances—amid a great waving of handkerchiefs and pennants.

At length the last good-by had been spoken, the last merry girl was gone, four of the teachers, too, had deserted their posts for holiday fun, and as the chug-chug of the last machine died away in the distance, Miss Pomeroy dropped her arms over the shoulders of the two drooping figures on the steps, and said cheerily, "And is this all I have left of my big flock? Well, we are going to have some joyous celebrating this year, I can promise you; but no doubt you have some Christmas work you would like to complete this morning, so I will not detain you now to discuss our plans. Run up to your rooms if you wish; we can do our talking at luncheon."

Bertha and Tabitha tried to smile bravely, but the tears were too near to permit of words, and in silence the lonely duet climbed the wide stairway to their floor, each intending to have a private little weep all by herself. But,

“The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men
Gang aft a-gley.”

There was a wild rush of feet in the hallway overhead, and a shower of light parcels filled the air, pelting the sober figures from right and left, as a chorus of merry voices screamed joyously, “Merry, merry Christmas!”

“You thought we had gone home, didn’t you?”

“But we haven’t and we aren’t going to! Miss Pomeroy said we might stay.”

“And the other girls left those packages for jokes. The real presents are all in the principal’s office.”

“Oh, girls!” gasped Tabitha, with eyes shining like diamonds.

“Oh, girls!” echoed Bertha, her face wreathed in her own sunny smile again.

CHAPTER XVIII

TABITHA'S CHRISTMAS

Christmas Day dawned bright and clear and with the first peep of dawn Tabitha was out of bed, shaking Chrystobel vigorously and calling, "Merry Christmas, lazybones! Wake up; it's day! The rising bell has rung. Didn't you hear it?"

"Oh, you are dreaming," drowsily murmured the weary girl in the other bed. "This is vacation time."

"But we have to get up just the same," laughed Tabitha. "I am going to wake Carrie and the others."

She bounced across the room, flung open the door and stopped abruptly, for suspended to the transom above her head hung two immense tarlatan stockings, stuffed to the very brim with bundles of all sorts and sizes. Across the hall from Carrie's transom swung two more similar socks, and dangling against Bertha's door was a third set.

Tabitha's wild shriek of surprise and delight brought the other five girls standing in their beds, and Carrie chattered anxiously, "Oh, what is the matter? Is the building on fire?"

"No, indeed. Merry Christmas!" shouted the black-eyed girl, tugging at the stocking marked with her name. "Open the door and see what you find. Santa Claus surely has been here while we slept."

There was the sound of pattering feet in the three rooms, and Chrystobel, now thoroughly awake, reached Tabitha's side just as the door across the hall and the one next to theirs burst open and four excited girls tumbled out. "Oh-h-h!" came a chorus of long-drawn-out, rapturous sighs, as five pair of eager arms clasped the bulky socks and jerked them loose.

"Ow!" shrieked Grace. "There is something awfully hard in mine. It nearly knocked a hole in my head. It's a handkerchief box, as sure as I am alive! Isn't it a dear? That is from Esther. Well, Kitty, what are you doing down there?"

Tabitha, in nightgown and slippers, sat in the middle of the floor, her huge stocking upside down in her lap, and gifts scattered all

about her, as with shining eyes and trembling hands she unwrapped each package in turn and gloated over its contents.

“A bunch of violets from Miss Pomeroy—she never forgets one of us. There is Bertha’s scarf that Cassandra tattled about—thank you, Bertha! You must have worked like a Trojan on that. I never could embroider silk. Here is a lovely handkerchief from Edith, a book from June, a calendar from Estelle, a— a silk waist from Carrie! You darling! Look at this lovely photo of Jessie and Julia, and isn’t the frame cute! A book of poems from Cassandra—she said her gift ought to make me the happiest of all because it would give me something new to recite—queer little, dear little midget! A set of Shakespeare from the Leonard twins, a bonbon dish from Vera. Here is a kiss in return. An apron from Grace, three ties, a pair of gloves, chocolates, handkerchiefs,—oh, did ever anyone see so many pretty things belonging to one person! I am perfectly crazy with happiness. Here is one weenty package more in the very tiptoe of my stocking—from Chrystobel—a ring with a real ruby in it. If there were another thing to

open, I should be bawling in earnest. That is the first ring I ever owned, girls—”

“Oh, there goes the first bell for breakfast,” interrupted Bertha, whisking up her stocking full of packages. “Ten minutes to dress in! Run, scuttle, hustle! We mustn’t be late

‘On Christmas morn, on Christmas morn’.”

She vanished abruptly, humming the beautiful carol; and three of her companions, following her example, swept up their numerous packages and flew away to dress.

Oh, that was a merry Christmas indeed for Tabitha! So bewildered, so delighted, so happy was she, that teachers and scholars were kept in a perfect gale of laughter during the breakfast hour, for the spirit of the day was upon her, the love of her new friends, manifested even in this material way, had touched her more deeply than anyone could guess, and the effervescent gladness in her heart had to bubble over. So they lingered long over the breakfast table, loath to bring to a close such a happy hour; but at length Miss Pomeroy rose, and smiling down into the expectant faces of her six holiday charges, she said,

“I think the first thing on our morning’s pro-

gram is a long walk, say to the park, and back. It is such a glorious day we mustn't waste a moment of it, and we have all laughed so much we certainly need some exercise. Miss Summers looks positively worn out with mirth. By the time we get back, the postman and expressman may have visited us again, and I am sure the minutes will pass more quickly for each of us impatient children if we are busy doing something. My box from home isn't here yet, and I am as eager as you are to see what my nieces and nephews have sent me."

"A walk is just what I need to work off my surplus energy," declared Tabitha enthusiastically. "May we take some crackers to feed the swans?"

"And oh, may I take my kodak, my spandy new Christmas kodak, for some pictures?" asked Grace eagerly. "I will snap you the very first one if you will say yes."

"That is quite an inducement," laughed Miss Pomeroy. "Of course you may take all the crackers you wish and as many kodaks as you possess."

So thus armed, a merry eight left Ivy Hall a few moments later and tramped gayly away to the park.

Upon their return, as the principal had predicted, they found the reception hall table loaded down with letters and parcels from the mail, while several express packages lay piled in a heap on the floor.

"Oh, Miss Pomeroy," shouted Carrie, reaching the bundles first and eagerly scanning the addresses. "Here is yours all right, and it is heavy as lead. This one is addressed to Grace; here is mine from Grandma; that is for Bertha; the big box is Pussy's, and so is this little fellow, and the other box is addressed to you and me together from papa. Here's a heap of letters. You can distribute them, Vera; I am too excited. Where is the hammer?"

"Not so fast, not so fast!" laughed Miss Pomeroy. "John will open these boxes and carry them up to your rooms where you can unpack them all by yourselves. Take your mail and scamper!" She shooed the capering girls up the wide stairway, where they were followed very shortly by the smiling John, bearing their new cargo of gifts.

"Oh, John, hurry, hurry!" coaxed Carrie, skipping about in a fever of impatience. "I can't wait. Who is yours from, Puss? Tom?"

"No; it isn't his writing, anyway. There is a little package from him and a letter—but—the big box is—from Reno, too."

"Why don't you open it and see who sent it?" asked Chrystobel, busy herself with a big home box.

"I will as soon as I investigate the things Mrs. Vane sent me. Aren't they pretty? A glove box with two pair of gloves in it. The hair-ribbons are from Mrs. McKittrick; but this package, I can't make out where it came from, either. It's a kodak! Grace, a kodak like yours!"

"You will need a detective," said Grace, dropping her own treasures to examine the mysterious packages of her companion. "What does the tag say?"

"Just, 'A brand from the burning'. Isn't that queer?"

Carrie paused in her excited unpacking of goodies from home, studied the little card for a moment and then said, "What will you bet that isn't from the hermit?"

"Why didn't I think of that before?" murmured Tabitha, dropping back on the floor, suddenly lost in thought.

"Well, Kitty, if you aren't the craziest!" exclaimed Vera at length. "Here you sit mooning over that camera when you haven't opened your brother's packages, or that big box I am dying to see, or even looked at the things Carrie has dumped into your lap from her folks."

Tabitha roused with a start and immediately tore off the coverings of the second mysterious box, saying with a smile, "I am keeping the best for dessert. I like to guess at what is inside each parcel before I open it. Oh, what a pretty hat!"

"Isn't it a darling! And look at that pretty dress goods! That is all the rage now."

"Chrystie, see Kitty's new shoes. Aren't they fine?"

"A whole outfit," murmured Grace, half enviously.

"Yes, and here is an envelope, Puss," added Carrie. "That ought to tell who sent it."

Tabitha mechanically broke the seal of the envelope bearing her name in the same writing as that on the outside of the box, and a twenty dollar bill dropped into her lap. "That is all there is in it," she said, shaking the paper

again. "No, it isn't. Here is a little scrap which reads, 'For dressmaker's bills'. Now isn't that provoking!"

"Provoking!" echoed Chrystobel. "I should call it luck!"

"Oh, I didn't mean the money and things. Those are splendid. But isn't it a shame not to know where they came from?"

"Why, didn't your brother send them?" asked Bertha in surprise, for she had been so deeply engrossed with her own gifts that only snatches of her companions' conversation had reached her.

"No, that isn't a bit like his writing, you see; and besides, he couldn't afford such things."

"Maybe Tom's letter tells," Carrie ventured. "Why don't you read it and see?"

"I had forgotten," laughed Tabitha, looking foolish, and hastily tearing open the letter in her lap. Then the rosy color in her cheeks paled, her eyes grew big with amazement, and her breath came in quick gasps. "Dad sent them," was all she said, and as if doubting the truth of her own statement, she read again the last paragraph of the busy brother's brief note:

"This is a poor apology for a letter, Puss,

but if I get it off in this next mail I haven't time for anything lengthy. I suppose by this time you have received the book I mailed you yesterday, and I hope the *big surprise* arrives in season to help you enjoy Christmas Day. What do you think! Dad stopped at Reno on his way back from another trip East, and he called on me to go shopping with him this morning. He himself selected the dress, but deferred to my notions in regard to the other frills, so if they don't suit, blame me. I noticed that most of the girls in Reno were wearing those fuzzy hats, so at my suggestion Dad got one to match your dress. I thought you would prefer a brown suit, but he wanted blue, and blue it is. I showed him around town and took him through the college buildings, and when he was gone I found fifty dollars in greenbacks on my dresser—my Christmas gift from him."

Tabitha slowly folded the paper, dropped it down into the box with its precious gifts, and lifting her shining eyes to the faces of her curious mates, she whispered softly, "I think I am perfectly happy!"

"And so are we," cried Chrystobel impul-

sively. "This has been the loveliest Christmas vacation I can remember. I wouldn't have missed staying here for anything."

"Nor I!" echoed Grace and Vera in the same breath, while Carrie and Bertha smiled their happiness.

Then came the grand dinner, and after that the games. They danced, they sang, they played everything they could think of, they messed in the kitchen, bribing the cook to surrender her domains to them for a candy pull, they inveigled the stately principal and shy Miss Summers into their romps, and how they did enjoy every minute of the gala day! But like all other days, it came to an end at last, and as the laughing group of weary merrymakers climbed the wide stairway at the bedtime hour, Carrie, who had lingered a moment behind the others in the hall below, bounded up the steps, calling excitedly, "Oh, girls, Miss Pomeroy says we don't have to sleep in our own rooms tonight, but can pair off any way we want to, and sleep wherever we choose. Isn't that great fun? Whom will you take, Puss?"

Tabitha stopped abruptly on the stairs. "Oh, I can have Carrie all to myself tonight," she

thought to herself, but as she opened her lips to speak, she saw Chrystobel's eyes fixed wistfully upon her own, and suddenly there rose before her a vision of her room-mate's self-sacrifice in electing to spend the holidays at school when she knew what pleasures would have been hers at her own beautiful home. She hesitated, looked at Carrie's eager face, read the longing in Bertha's eyes, saw its reflection in Grace and Vera, and answered, "I choose all of you. What are you going to do about it?"

"Draw lots, you dear little Christmas queen!" cried Bertha promptly. "You are the most popular girl in school, Kitty Catt. Just see how we fight over you! Here are some slips of paper from our guessing game. Take your turn. The two longest, the two middle and the two shortest are mates."

There on the stairs they drew their fate—Tabitha and Chrystobel, Grace and Bertha, Carrie and Vera. Then with a merry laugh over the result, they linked arms and marched up to bed, with one exception a little disappointed, perhaps, but happy nevertheless.

The lights went out, five pair of sleepy eyes

closed in slumber, the great city grew still, but Tabitha lay awake in her narrow bed looking up into the starlit sky with bright, sparkling, happy eyes which held no trace of sorrow or longing, as she whispered reverently:

“O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent hours go by.”

She thought of all the joys the day had brought her, such unexpected pleasures that it seemed as if her heart would burst with gladness; she thought of the girls who had done so much to give her this beautiful holiday; she thought of the scene on the stairs, and of Bertha's words, which, without a particle of conceit, she felt were the truth; she thought of Tom away at college, and wondered if his holiday had been as delightful as hers; she thought of the friends at Silver Bow, of Aunt Maria in the East, of the stern father keeping lonely vigil on the desert, and here her thoughts lingered. Had he received the calendar she sent him, and was he glad? What had prompted him to buy her the lovely gifts the express box

had contained? Was he, after all, growing to be like jolly Mr. Carson? His remembrance had been the crowning touch of the day. How could she ever thank him? An idea suddenly popped into her mind as if in answer to her question, but she frowned at it, shook her head, protested that she could never do such a thing, and then—she did it.

Creeping carefully, noiselessly out of bed, she threw a kimono over her nightgown, turned on the electric light, drew out writing materials and began her first letter to the father whom she did not know or understand.

“Dear Father,” she wrote, “I take my pen in hand to try to express in a feeble measure my deep and sincere gratitude for the many beautiful gifts you have sent me—

“Oh, rats!” The pen stopped its deliberate movements, the paper was roughly crumpled and flung into the waste basket. “That would make him sick with disgust. What in the world shall I say?

“Dear Father,—The Christmas box arrived this morning and its contents are greatly appreciated, I can assure you. How am I ever to thank you enough!—

“Certainly not by such a stilted scribble as that. Sounds as if I might be addressing the president of the Associated Charities. Oh, dear, it is such a piece of work to write to one’s father! Carrie never has half the fuss; but then I don’t suppose I would either if Dad was like Mr. Carson—or Tom. That’s it. I will just pretend I am writing to Tom; I can say anything to him. Here goes!

“Dear Dad,—The things arrived this morning, and they are—

“Shall I say ‘bully’? Tom would, but that is a boy’s word, and it is slang besides. Miss Pomeroy says a lady doesn’t use slang. I will use ‘great’. No, that isn’t much better. Well, ‘splendid’ will do.”

The busy pen went on scratching until the page was filled, then a second, a third, and still she had not finished. The clock struck midnight, then one; and with a flourish, Tabitha wrote at the bottom of the tenth closely scribbled page, “With love, Tabitha,” sighed with weary satisfaction, folded the sheets neatly, and slipped them into an envelope just as Chrystobel’s eyes opened and the surprised girl inquired sleepily, “Whatever are you doing, Kitty, up at this time of night?”

"Writing a letter."

"Couldn't you wait until morning?"

"No, dear, I have waited too long already," answered Tabitha, turning out the light and scrambling back into bed. "I *had* to tell him how good everyone is to me, and how good he is, too."

CHAPTER XIX

A STRIKE!

The weeks vanished all too quickly to suit the black-eyed maid from the desert, and she often found herself wondering where the time went to, for before she realized it, winter had slipped away and spring was nearly gone. Now May was half over, and in another month school would be closed for the summer. Carrie was to spend her vacation on the Oregon farm with her grandmother, and Tabitha must return to the desert alone. She sat swinging idly under the pepper trees, her Latin grammar on her knees, but with eyes staring off across the smooth lawn and beautiful shrubbery, thinking mournfully of the long, hot weeks on the burning desert before September would come again.

“I have hardly had a chance to say a word to Carrie all this year, and now after counting on three months alone with her in Silver Bow, she is going away for her vacation. That is

always the way things happen with me. Some people have everything and others nothing." Half unconsciously she began to hum the tune Mrs. Vane had composed for *The Discontented Buttercup*; then realizing what she was singing, she laughed.

"Now aren't you ashamed of yourself, Tabitha Catt?" she exclaimed aloud. "When you have the chance to go to boarding school and get an education, and make so many beautiful friendships and have everything so perfectly lovely, here you are envying Carrie because she is going to her grandmother's for vacation. She isn't well, and it wouldn't be good for her to go back to the desert for the hot summer months. Besides, you promised to be good and not to envy people any more. You are a discontented buttercup.

'Look bravely up into the sky,
And be content with knowing
That God wished for a buttercup
Just here, where you are growing.'"

"What's that about a buttercup?" asked a merry voice behind her, so unexpectedly that Tabitha nearly fell out of the hammock. So

intent had she been upon her own thoughts that she had not heard the tiptoeing footsteps on the soft grass, and was startled when Carrie plumped down beside her, and three or four other girls ranged themselves in comfortable positions in the fresh clover at their feet.

"How you frightened me!" cried the absorbed songstress, moving over to give Carrie more room. "Where have you been? You weren't in your rooms when I came down, so I slipped out here to study."

"About buttercups?" teased Bertha, tickling her throat with a long grass. "If you had gone up to the third floor you would have found us all in Hattie's room, admiring the watch she just got for her birthday. Have you seen it?"

"No, I was just finishing a letter when she called us, and by the time I was ready to go, you had all disappeared. I forgot she had changed her room."

"Oh," cried Carrie abruptly, "here is a letter for you! We stopped at your room as we came down and you weren't in, so I brought it along. I got one from papa, too, and what do you think? There has been a strike on the Tom Cat!"

A burst of laughter from the girls on the grass greeted this remark, and even Tabitha joined in, though the unusual piece of news made her heart beat fast and her eyes glow with an eagerness she could not suppress.

"When—how big—" she began, but Cassandra interrupted with the puzzled question, "What did they strike the tomcat for and who did it?"

"The Tom Cat is the name of a claim Kitty's father owns, and when there is a strike on a mining claim, it means that gold or silver has been found," explained Carrie patiently. "Silver Bow is a silver mining camp, but the Cat Group is about thirty miles from there and it has gold on it. Papa says the vein they have uncovered is very rich and promises to be a big one. They have offered your father a fortune for just that one claim, but he won't sell. He will be a rich man now, Puss. Aren't you glad?"

Tabitha sat in a daze, hardly daring to believe her ears. Could it be after all these years her father was to find wealth again, or was it all a dream?

"Well, you are the queerest girl!" declared

Chrystobel, who was watching her curiously. "If anyone had told me my father had found a gold mine, I should jump up and down and shout, and then write for some more money right away. You can have everything you want now, can't you?"

Chrystobel had secretly pitied Tabitha because her monthly allowance of pocket money was so small, and she did not understand how anyone could receive the good news with such a calmly disinterested air. But Tabitha was not disinterested in the least. She was simply too busy with her thoughts to notice that her companions evidently expected some demonstration on her part in view of the astonishing news. Carrie was the only one who understood, and she explained,

"Kitty is so surprised she doesn't know what to say, do you, Puss? Better open your letter and see what they write you about it. Is it from Mrs. Vane?"

Tabitha's letter had remained unnoticed in her lap where Carrie had tossed it, but now she lifted it, and inspected the envelope before replying, "No, it is from Tom. Why—I—I—think I—won't read it just now."

Her flushed face had paled, and she caught her breath sharply, for the letter was post-marked Silver Bow instead of Reno; but without further comment she slipped it into her Latin Book and joined in the gay chatter with her companions, a secret fear tugging at her heart.

Sometime later, after successfully eluding the laughing group, she stole away to her room, locked the door, and tore open the envelope with hands that trembled so violently she could scarcely control them, whispering to herself, "What can Tom be doing at home? College doesn't close for a month yet. I wonder if his money is all gone, and he can't finish the term. Or has Dad sent for him to help out in the mine? No, he wouldn't do that, surely."

She spread the rattling paper out on the table, and with difficulty spelled out the scrawl written with pencil and evidently in much haste. The message was brief:

Dear Puss:—I suppose you have already heard the good news of the strike on Dad's claims. I meant to have written you about it before, but have been too busy. The vein is larger than at first appeared, and quite rich;

but of course we can't tell yet whether it is more than a pocket. We think it is a sure-enough vein, however.

In timbering a shaft which threatened to cave in, Dad was hurt, and they sent for me. We have him at the house, for he refused to be taken to the Miners' Hospital. I am glad it happened so near the end of the college year. If he gets along all right, I can take the examinations I must miss now in September, and go along with the work of the class next year. When will your school be out? I don't think you have ever said. I suppose you are busy now getting ready for examinations—or don't you have such things there? Don't study *too* hard, Puss, and don't be alarmed about Dad.

With love, Tom.

The letter fluttered unheeded to the floor, and Tabitha, having read anxiety between the lines, sat in a brown study.

Dad hurt, Tom at home, Aunt Maria in the East! She was only a little girl, but she could help a great deal around the house, and maybe—maybe she could be of assistance in the sick-room. She shuddered at this thought, for fear of her father was still strong in her

heart. But she could not shirk her duty; she must go home. She gathered up the letter, stole out of the room and down to the principal's office, where she found Miss Pomeroy still at work at her desk.

"What is it, dear?" asked the busy woman, smiling up from her papers at the sober yet determined black eyes.

"I am going home," answered the girl, laying Tom's message on the desk and waiting for it to be read.

When Miss Pomeroy had finished, she turned to the child at her side, and slipping her arm about the slight figure, drew her close, saying, "You think they need you, dear? He doesn't say anything about wanting you to come."

"Oh, Tom wouldn't ask me to come, no matter how much he might want me. But there is no one at home in Silver Bow to take care of Dad, except Tom, and men don't know much about nursing sick folks. I *ought* to go."

"I think your decision is the right one, Tabitha," said the sweet voice after a long pause. "I don't like to see you go, but I am glad for your sake that school is so nearly done that you

will lose only a few weeks. That can easily be made up during the summer. Your teachers will tell you how much further to study. I am so sorry, little girl, that this has happened! I will do anything in my power to help you, and would urge you to stay and finish the term, only that I would not want to keep you when you feel that you may be needed there. When do you want to go?"

"Tonight," was the prompt reply, for ~~some~~ way Miss Pomeroy's words gave her added courage in her hard decision, and she wanted to be gone before she had a chance to repent. "Don't tell the girls. It is hard to have to leave just now when the year is so nearly done, though if I must go, I am glad I shall miss only four weeks more of school. But I really can't say good-by to anyone. It has been *so* lovely here, Miss Pomeroy!"

"Dear little Tabitha," murmured the woman tenderly. "It has been lovely to have you with us, too, and I shall look forward to next autumn to bring back our precious girl who is not only learning life's great lessons herself, but is also teaching us the beauty of living. Go now to your packing. I will send Miss Sum-

mers to help you, and will myself attend to your ticket. As soon as the trunk is ready, John will take it to the depot and have it checked. Keep a brave heart under the little jacket, dear, and remember the One who is everywhere."

So a few hours later she was helped aboard the train by the dusky porter, and was whirled away into the darkness of the night toward home, cheered but anxious.

CHAPTER XX

A HAPPY HOME

Unknown to Tabitha, Miss Pomeroy had telegraphed her coming, and Tom was there to meet her at the station when the cars slowed down at the forsaken-looking desert town. She looked at his white, haggard face and heavy eyes, and her heart stood still. "Oh, Tom, he isn't—"

"No, dear, not that. He is better this morning, the doctor says; but he is pretty badly hurt. I am glad you have come, though we didn't think it was necessary to send for you."

That was all they said until the weather-beaten cottage was reached. Then just as Tabitha opened the screen to enter the stifling kitchen, Tom spoke:

"He is in your room. He insisted upon being put there with the bed drawn up by the window. They probably won't let you see him yet, but there is a heap of things to be done that I haven't the slightest notion about, Puss. 

can sweep and dust and make beds, and even cook potatoes and boil coffee, but how in creation do you make broths that a sick man will eat? And where can a fellow get cool water this kind of weather with no ice in town? The ice-plant burned last week."

Tabitha's anxiety lifted for the moment, and laying aside her dainty traveling dress, she donned a big apron and fell to work setting the little house to rights. Those were hard days that followed, and more than once the burden seemed almost too great for the slender shoulders. Two miners were hurt at the Silver Legion, and the nurse was called away to care for them at the hospital. The hot winds descended suddenly upon the desert and Silver Bow writhed under the fierce glare of the blazing sun. All who could get away left the stifling town for the cool breath of the seashore, and no help could be found for the girl working so bravely in the lonely little cottage, taking the place of nurse and housekeeper and facing a situation before which many a stouter heart would have quailed. Tom did his best, but the sick man became possessed of a whim that no one should wait upon him but poor, tired Tabi-

tha, and day and night found her ministering to him in the sweltering heat that seemed fairly to cook town and people.

Dr. Vane's face grew very grave as he watched the struggle, and one day he said to Tom as he was leaving on his other calls, "Is it possible for your aunt to come out here again?"

"I am afraid not, sir," was the discouraged answer. "She is just recovering from a severe siege of fever herself."

The doctor shook his head. "I ought to have sent your father to Los Angeles the minute I was called to attend him; but he was so set against it that I didn't insist, and now—"

"Is there any danger?"

"If this heat would let up a little, I think there would be no doubt but that we could pull him through. But—Tabitha ought to have some help for her own sake."

Poor Tom! He could see that the little sister was weakening, and he was doing all in his power to lighten her load, but he could not help her in her ceaseless watching which was telling so fearfully on her strength. In an agony of anguish and despair he slipped out to the back steps and sat heavily down in the shade of the

house, dropping his hot head on his arms and two stinging tears coursing down his cheeks.

"I beg your pardon, but isn't this where Mr. Catt lives?"

The voice spoke directly at his elbow, and Tom, so much absorbed in his unhappy thoughts that he had not heard the approaching footsteps, looked up in surprise to see a tall, well-dressed, refined-looking stranger on the lower step.

"Yes, sir."

"May I see him?"

"He is very sick—hurt—and doesn't know anyone. We can't allow folks to see him."

"I understood that he was seriously injured and that you needed someone to help care for him. I—"

"We are in need of help," Tom interrupted; "but he won't let anyone wait on him but my sister."

"He will me." The man spoke with such confidence that again Tom looked his surprise. "The little girl is all tired out. Take me to your father. Oh, it is all right! I have Dr. Vane's sanction. Besides—well, I may as well tell you now. I am the 'hermit of the hills'

whom Tabitha saved from burning to death more than a year ago. I was your father's partner once and his dearest friend; but I proved false to my trust. I cheated him out of his share in some valuable property—wrecked his whole life. Take me to him and don't fear the consequences."

Tom rose quickly. "Come inside. Tabitha is with him now."

He led the unexpected guest to the little room where the sick man lay tossing and muttering in the delirium of fever.

"Why didn't you put ice in that water?" he was saying querulously. "If you are bound to feed me boiled water, I want it cold."

Patient little Tabitha sighed wearily and turned toward the kitchen with the rejected glass on the tray, just as the hermit paused on the threshold.

"Here is a glass of ice-water, Lynne," said the stranger, taking the tumbler from the girl's hand. "Drink this and go to sleep."

"Why, hello, Decker!" exclaimed the patient, with a gleam of intelligence lighting his face for the moment. "How did you come here? Say, that water is fine!"

Dropping back among the pillows, the exhausted man slept; and Tabitha, relieved of her responsibility, crept away to hold a quiet jubilation with Tom before she, too, fell asleep, worn out by her tireless vigil.

Meanwhile the stranger busied himself with the neglected housework, and soon the cottage took on a comfortable appearance again; Tom's spirits began to rise and hope to sing in his discouraged heart once more. Perhaps things were not as bad as they had seemed after all. At evening the busy doctor drove up again, and was rejoiced to find both patient and nurse still sleeping.

"There is a big storm brewing up in the mountains," he announced jubilantly, "and we ought to have it a bit cooler here in a few hours. Let them sleep as long as they will; both need it. Keep up your courage, Tom; Simmons is a jewel and knows just what to do." He was gone again, leaving Tom standing on the steps in the blackness of the night, singing in his heart a hymn of thanksgiving.

The storm broke at length with terrible fury, and all night the heavy thunder crashed from peak to peak as if threatening total destruction

to everything on the desert below; but when the hurricane had spent its fury, the fearful heat was broken, and the whole world awoke refreshed from its bath. In the sweet coolness of the early dawn, Mr. Catt opened his eyes to consciousness for the first time since the day of the accident, and his gaze fell upon the face of his strange nurse sitting beside his bed.

"Decker Simmons!" he exclaimed in a weak, incredulous voice.

"Yes, Lynne. I have come back to face the music, but I have brought with me every cent of your money and interest. Can you forgive the great wrong I have done you?" His scarred face worked pathetically, and he stretched out his hands somewhat hesitatingly, with entreaty in his whole bearing.

The sick man looked steadily at him for a long moment, then clasped the proffered hand weakly, and murmured, "I forgive!"

A deep silence fell over the room; then after a few moments of thought too sacred for words, the invalid asked faintly, "Have you told Thomas and Tabitha?"

"Yes."

He sighed contentedly, and still holding

tightly to the hermit's hand, drifted away into refreshing, health-giving slumber.

So it happened that a few days later when strength was flowing back into the injured man's veins, he called his children to him. They went with something like trepidation in their hearts; but one look into the white face on the pillow told them that this was not the same man whom they had known and feared all their lives. It may have been the restored confidence in his friend, it may have been that the fever had burned out the austerity and selfishness of his heart and brought the real fatherly tenderness to the surface. He mutely held out a thin hand to each, and they awkwardly gave him theirs, not knowing what to say and sitting in silent embarrassment on either side of the bed, waiting for him to speak. At last he laid Tabitha's hand on the counterpane, and fumbling beneath his pillow, drew forth a bright gold piece, which he held out to her, smiling sadly at the surprise in her face.

"What is this?" she found voice to ask.

"Long ago I punished you severely—too severely—and you called me a beast. I think that was the first time I ever recognized how

thoroughly beastly I was. I—I wasn't man enough to tell you so, nor to admit how sorry I was for my severity; so after you were asleep, I put this in your hand, thinking it might—make up for my harshness. I suppose it dropped to the floor during the night and rolled into that wide crack in the corner where the bed used to stand. I saw the glint of it this morning when a sunbeam chanced to fall upon it, and it brought back the memory of that other day. Tabitha, I am sorry. Is it too late to forgive me now?"

Tom surreptitiously drew his free hand across his eyes; and Tabitha, almost too surprised for reply, squeezed her father's arm in a gentle caress, as she whispered chokingly, "I forgave that long ago. It did seem too great a punishment then, but it taught me a lesson I have never forgotten."

"Poor little daughter! What a selfish brute I have been! And I might have made you so happy!"

"Don't, Dad!" she pleaded. "I—I—you have made me happy now! The rest doesn't count!"

He smiled tenderly into the soft black eyes,

as he drew her closer to him and said wistfully, "I wish the rest didn't count, children; but the fact still remains that I have not done right by my boy and girl. I am sorry, and when I get up from this bed, I mean to be a better man.

"Decker has come back, we are going into partnership again and work those claims for all there is in them. Tom shall finish college and Tabitha shall go back to boarding school or wherever she likes. There is money enough for whatever you want, and it is all yours. A man with children like mine is graciously blessed. I have been a fool and wasted many precious years. I can't bring them back and live them over, but I can and will live the rest of my life right in God's sight. Can you still love me in spite of all that is past, children?"

For answer, by common impulse they slipped their arms around him, and he drew each face down to his and kissed it. The barriers of years were swept away, and father and children were united by love.

For a long time the little group sat there talking over plans for their future happiness and drinking in the supremest joy of living.

Then the father spoke abruptly: "There is

another matter, children. When I named you as I did, I thought I was spiting the world. My own life had been made bitter by just that same thing, and I wanted to get even; but I only broke your mother's heart and made you both as miserable as I had been. It isn't too late yet to change that. Drop those names I gave you and choose for yourselves what you would like to be called."

They stared at each other, then at him, in dumb amazement. Change their names! The possibility of having such a privilege granted them had never occurred to either one before. At length Tabitha spoke:

"If you had told me that once, I would have done it only too quickly; but now I have learned that if a person is kind and lovable, no one cares what the name is. Pretty names don't make nice people, and homely ones don't make them bad, either. I am—beginning—to rather like 'Tabitha' now, and I don't wish to change my name."

"Or I mine," added Tom; and once more the father drew their faces down to his own and kissed them.

THE END

